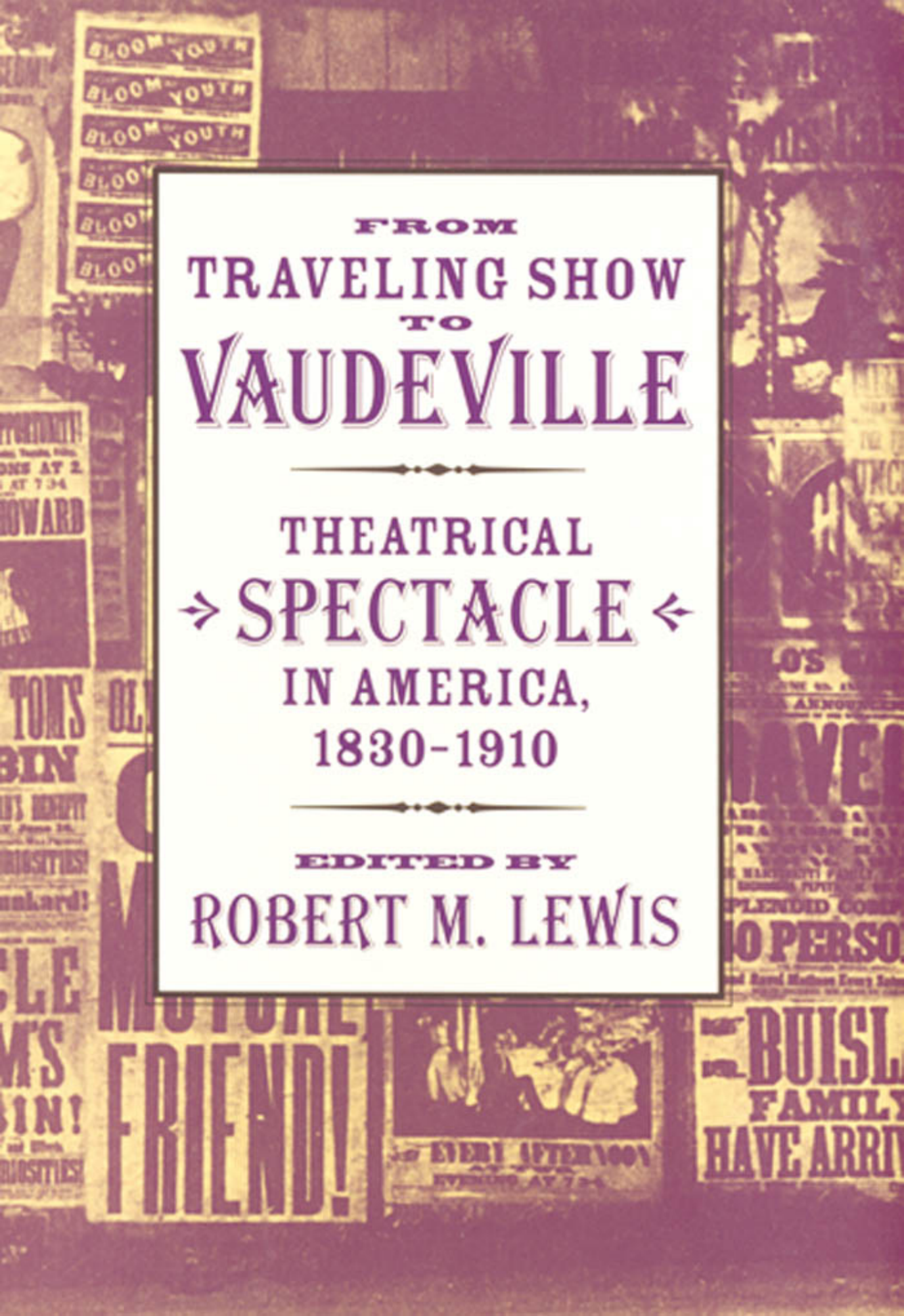


FROM TRAVELING SHOW TO VAUDEVILLE

THEATRICAL SPECTACLE IN AMERICA, 1830–1910

EDITED BY

ROBERT M. LEWIS

VISIT…



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Edited by Robert M. Lewis

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PREFACE

Compiling this anthology has been fun but also a protracted business. For many years I have taught courses on historical popular culture and, more recently, on show business. Finding movies and music for the modern period is a relatively simple task, but for the nineteenth century, I faced pedagogical difficulties not easily resolved. Many excellent monographs and periodical articles provide critical comment but the primary sources on which their arguments depend are seldom readily accessible even to scholars. There are many anthologies of the plays most frequently performed, but the minstrel monologues and comic dialogues issued by mass-market publishers like Denison or De Witt are now very scarce. Even the most comprehensive internet resources, including the Library of Congress's innovative and extensive American Memory website, give limited opportunities to read a showman's autobiography or to compare a typical theater program of the 1850s with a vaudeville bill of the 1890s. While researching in other fields in rare book collections, I began to collect documentary evidence of entertainments once popular so that students might understand how showmen fashioned their presentations and how spectators responded to shows.

This anthology has examples of major forms of commercial amusements in the nineteenth century. They may appear to be a miscellany without theme or focus, a jumble of songs and skits, of dances and dunces. But beneath the veneer of minstrel mask, theatrical grease-paint, or spangled costume, there were elements in common in the animal acts and acrobatic turns that appeared in circus rings, wild west arenas, vaudeville halls, or even in highbrow theaters. Performers were often versatile utility players who joined a repertory company for a season and were then able to adapt to the demands of the production of the moment. Impresarios had similarly broad experience of theatrical enterprises and were always sensitive to the wishes of a live audience and thus required to improvise. Throughout the century, most popular entertainments were variety shows with comedy and melodrama, and they were both resolutely commercial and decidedly American.

I hope that this anthology provokes wider research. Augustus Rapp seems to have been typical of the showmen who traveled by horse and buggy through

the Midwest and upper South at the turn of the century, but he was unusual in writing an autobiography. How small town audiences responded, and how Rapp managed to generate sufficient interest in a scattered community of a few thousand to sustain his week-long programs of magic, marionettes, music, and movies, is less clear. Local newspapers can tell us about the commercialization of entertainment, and research in the past generation on the minutiae of advertising and itineraries has transformed interpretations of the circus as a business. The distinctive ethnic and racial traditions of amusements, under-represented in this anthology, that made the multicultural nation quite different from its European counterparts, also require much closer attention. The diversity of popular entertainments, and the reflections and refractions of big-city shows in small towns and isolated farms, display the creative energy and entrepreneurial dynamism of a country determined to express its distinctive identity.

This project would not have been possible without assistance from the university libraries of Brown, California, Chicago, Cornell, Harvard, Princeton, Texas, and Yale, and from the collections of the Library Company of Philadelphia and the New-York Historical Society, and especially, of the British Library, the Library of Congress, and the New York Public Library. The interlibrary loans section of the University of Birmingham always made valiant efforts on my behalf, and the university made a research grant toward the cost of ordering documents. My students raised queries that prompted me to reconsider and review the project. John Walsh, the finest seminar teacher I have known, first stimulated my interest in American history. My friend and former colleague Brian Harding taught me most of the little I know about American literature. Forrest Robinson encouraged this anthology from the beginning, and Ron Walters was as generous as ever in recommending it. I have gained very much over the years from the scholarship and friendship of Lew Erenberg and Barney Mergen. Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton gave very constructive comments on the introduction. At the Johns Hopkins University Press, Robert J. Brugger and Melody Herr urged me to clarify my arguments, and Jack Kirshbaum was an efficient and gently critical copyeditor.

My foremost obligations are to two people who have not read one word of this. John Higham taught me that asking questions of significance was the most challenging and the most rewarding task for the historian. Half a lifetime later, I still marvel at the coherence of his argument, the elegance of his prose, and his ability to generalize and make connections. My wife, Jan, seldom complained when I missed family vacations, filled half the house with books and files, or used our bank account to fund research trips to New York or Washington or order more and more documents. She believed that this project would one day be completed, and certainly, without her patience, it would have remained unfinished.

FROM TRAVELING SHOW TO VAUDEVILLE

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INTRODUCTION
From Celebration to Show Business

Before Tin Pan Alley's phonograph and Hollywood's moving picture overshadowed the Broadway stage, live performance dominated American popular entertainment. In the early republic there were public spectacles open to all—communal celebrations, folk festivals, firework displays on the Fourth of July, processions of militia companies, and street parades that usually ran to the rowdy and raucous.[1] Later, traveling professionals offered escape for the price of admission. Even Americans who lived in remote villages—weary of toil in factory or on farm but lucky enough to have a dime or a quarter in their pockets—could enjoy the brief spectacles supplied by acrobats, animals exotic and extraordinary, "curiosities," conjurers, carousels, clowns, cowboys, dwarfs, dancers, dioramas, magicians, mechanical marvels, melodramas, menageries, and minstrels, often under the pretense of being educational. Whether organizers merely jumbled together these "clever turns" or expertly packaged them, whether they graced a tent, small-town "opera house," or urban "palace," the shows were almost always variety shows, and traveling was essential to any profitable amusement enterprise.

"The Decline of 'The Road,'" *Billboard* reported in late 1925, signaled the end of a century-long tradition of touring companies presenting live theater. According to a survey conducted by show business's trade paper, two-thirds of the halls that had welcomed itinerant performers fifteen years earlier now restricted their programs to moving pictures or vaudeville.[2] To many theater-owners, personal appearances seemed outdated: modern means of mechanical reproduction presented melodrama at lower cost and in novel form. The transition to machine-made culture had begun almost imperceptibly in the preceding generation, as showmen supplemented the standard routines of variety acts with the latest inventions, gimmicks, and gadgets. By 1925 small-town playhouses no longer needed one-night stands of repertory players "on the road": the photoplay and the picture show had supplanted them.

We might well wonder how this momentous change came about, and what it tells us of American society in the nineteenth century. The documents collected in this volume argue forcefully that the energy and enterprise of

showmen, along with the diffusion of new technologies, worked to transform the festivities of the early republic into the theatrical spectacles of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. But behind the showman's entrepreneurial zeal and fascinating techniques lay something else—a striking change in American attitudes to "diversions" and commercial entertainment itself.

Mr. Beecher and the Learned Pig

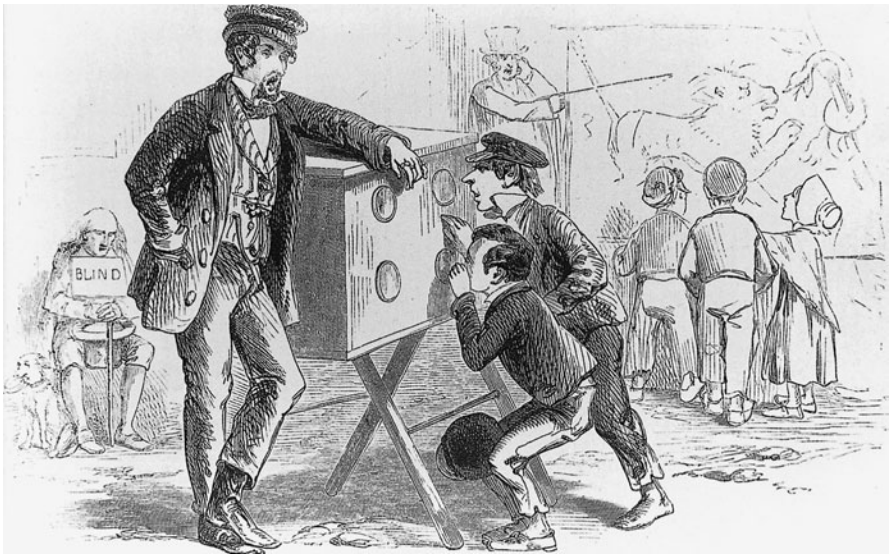
In the late 1860s actress and playwright Olive Logan poured scorn on the presumptions of self-styled "professionals" in the field of entertainment. In their view, she complained, "the Show Business" embraced any and every public performance given to a paying audience. Logan considered herself far more discriminating than the purveyors of cheap thrills. She valued good taste and genuine talent enriched by training, experience, and dedication to "art," whether in "the drama" or opera or ballet or in the lyceum lectures of Henry Ward Beecher. "I respect the actor who is an artist,—even the harmless clown of the pantomime, who makes us laugh without offending decency." Very different in character were the charlatans of the amusement world, the performers from dime museums, circus tents, and minstrel halls, who courted popularity by pandering to the prejudices and ignorance of the audience, and solely for monetary gain. The most despicable of all were the "clog-dancing creatures" of the "blonde burlesque," who merely exposed their bodies and uttered ribald remarks too coarse even for the lowly minstrel fool. In the past these disreputable players had been considered fit only for the low-class "concert-saloon" and "variety-show." Now they ventured into "the temples of the drama," and posing as actresses, sought equal status with the most esteemed in the legitimate theater. Their selfish and single-minded pursuit of profit excluded issues of taste, quality, and morality. This "leg business," Logan noted with disdain, was merely business, not art. According to these "professionals," all performers were in "the show business." "It must be a very wide world which should include Mr. Beecher with the learned pig," she commented sarcastically.[3]

The phrase "the show business"—what Olive Logan called a "curious" and "remarkably comprehensive term"—was of recent vintage. The first recorded use seems to have been in 1850. However, "show," or "shew," denoting a display or exhibition for the purpose of entertainment, had a much longer history. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, combinations derived from it further elaborated the original meaning of the word. The "show bill," "show board," and "show cloth" advertised the "show box," "show case," and "show piece" in the "show hall," "show place," "show room," and "show shop" operated by the "show folk," "show girl," and "show man." "Showmanship" appeared in 1859. "The show" also expanded as a concept. The "peep-

show" had been typical of street entertainment that was "showy" or "showish" and primarily visual. However, Punch and Judy stands also had dialogue and music, and pantomime, traditionally mute, acquired words. Since Shakespeare's day, the "stage" had encompassed not only the raised platform for performances but the entertainers who appeared on it and the product of their endeavors. Commercial entertainment, Logan lamented, "embraces in its comprehensiveness all sorts of performances"—in the show or on the stage.[4]

The peepshow generally had a low reputation as a tawdry spectacle hawked on city streets or at seasonal fairs by dishonest tricksters.[5] Like Logan, entertainers who took pride in their artistic achievements wished to distinguish their wholesome diversions from vulgar "shows." Buffalo Bill's Wild West always insisted that its presentations were "exhibitions" or "expositions" of frontier skills. With pride, the 1893 program quoted journalist Brick Pomeroy's boast that the demonstrations of horsemanship were not theatrical pretense—"all this imaginary Romeo and Juliet business"—but reality. In 1898 it went further: "It is not a 'show' in any sense of the word, but it is a series of original, genuine and instructive object lessons."[6] Like the Wild West's publicity agents, impresario Dan Rice worried that the circus's tarnished reputation discouraged the respectable from attending. Rice's solution was to discard his clown's costume and rebrand his amusement package of spectacle and burlesque as Dan Rice's Great Show, "to make Equestrian exhibition worthy of the countenance of the intellectual and refined." "Dan has discarded the word 'Circus' as being unworthy of his exhibition," announced the *National Intelligencer* in 1860. For Rice, at least, his "Great Show" signified cultural uplift.[7]

Showmen remained sensitive to the public's perceptions, and so the language of show business, as Logan noted, was losing distinctive and pejorative meanings. Samuel Johnson in 1755 had defined "entertainment" in disparaging terms as "the lower comedy." "Recreation" and "amusement" had been nicely differentiated. "Whatever amuses serves to kill time, to lull the faculties, and banish reflection," George Crabbe wrote in *English Synonymes* in 1831. To "recreate," Webster's dictionary declared, was "to refresh after toil; to reanimate, as languid spirits or exhausted strength." By midcentury the liberal Frederic W. Sawyer dismissed such scruples as old-fashioned. "There is embraced under the head of amusements all those entertainments, diversions, sports, recreations, pastimes, games, and plays, that belong to the light, cheerful, and sportive employments of our powers of body and mind," he declared in *A Plea for Amusements*. In 1859, in the introduction to his pamphlet on leisure as a social problem, Presbyterian minister James L. Corning was equally dismissive of sophistry: "The words 'amusement' and 'recreation' are used interchangeably in the following chapters."[8] The old linguistic niceties seemed irrelevant in an era when commercial entertainment was expanding so rapidly throughout the country and gaining widespread acceptance.



Outdoor exhibitions and peep shows of traveling showmen were familiar sights in country and city. *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 9 (October 1854): 714.

Traveling Shows and Showmen

P. T. Barnum was the preeminent "showman" of Olive Logan's era. His bestselling autobiography recounted the exploits of a self-made entrepreneur in "the show line" who realized the commercial possibilities of all manner of "shows." He had managed a circus acrobat and juggler, arranged an exhibition of "wild sports of the Western Prairies" in Hoboken, supervised reenactments of city street cries in Vauxhall Garden, and organized concerts of the Swedish soprano Jenny Lind. In his American Museum on Broadway, he displayed human "curiosities" of all kinds, ranging from fat boys and thin men to waxworks and wild beasts. In the museum "Lecture Room," he presented melodrama and minstrelsy, acrobatic somersaults, and dancing "Rocky Mountain savages." Already by 1855, when he published his memoirs, Barnum's career illustrated the triumph of variety entertainment. His celebrity and his success in presenting babies and beauties to a receptive public gave credence to Olive Logan's warning that traditional distinctions between frivolous amusement and instructive recreation were being eroded.

The origins of variety entertainment lay in the traveling shows of the early nineteenth century. During the prosperous times before and especially after the Revolution, when New England and Mid-Atlantic farmers increased production of grain and dairy goods to purchase finished cotton cloth and tableware, itinerant peddlers carried imported English and American manufac-

tures to the smallest town and farm. Along the rough tracks and river estuaries came the agents of what David Jaffee has called the "village enlightenment"—portrait painters, furniture makers, book dealers, school teachers, circuit preachers, patent-medicine vendors, tinsmiths, and artisans of all kinds, who wrought a cultural transformation of the northeast by the 1820s.[9] Showmen were less welcome, unless they exhibited mechanical marvels or beasts with unusual qualities that were deemed edifying and educational. The performances of itinerant actors, acrobats, and clowns were often considered among the vain amusements and frivolous diversions that threatened republican virtue. Connecticut's Act for the Suppressing of Mountebanks of 1773 prohibited "any games, tricks, plays, juggling or feats of uncommon dexterity and agility of body" that attracted "great numbers of people, to the corruption of manners, promoting of idleness, and the detriment of good order and religion."[10] In 1819 New York State made it unlawful to "exhibit or perform for gain and profit any puppet show, wire dance, or any other idle shows, acts or feats," but permitted "any museum or repository of natural curiosities, wax figures, useful works of art, or . . . the exhibition of any animal."[11]

Nevertheless, traveling showmen found ways to evade the punitive license fees and petty restrictions of local and state authorities. The canvas tent, first used by J. Purdy Brown as a pavilion in the 1820s, gave showmen greater flexibility; a fifty-foot round top could be quickly erected, provided seating for nearly a thousand in densely packed rows of backless seats, and was an effective substitute for the temporary wooden arenas that were too expensive and laborious to construct for anything other than an extended stay in the largest cities. Even in the 1820s, before canals, steamships, improved turnpike roads, and railroads made travel easier and quicker, there were a dozen circus troupes, each with some ten wagons and thirty employees, operating mainly along or near the northern seaboard, but venturing also into the Hudson River valley, into Ohio, and the southern seaboard states. A waxworks exhibition or some display of human skill was available to almost everyone. So familiar a figure was the wandering peddler of wonders with his portable cabinet of curiosities that the satirist Artemus Ward assumed the showman's persona for his stage "lectures" and his humorous essays on "the show bizness" in *Vanity Fair*. "I'm travelin with a tent, which is better nor [than] hirin hauls," Ward announced to his readers in 1859. "My show konsists of a serious of wax works, snakes, a paneramy kalled a Grand Movin Diarea of the War in the Crymear, komic songs and the Cangeroo." His catalogue of oddities was not mere whimsy. While on summer vacation in 1838, Nathaniel Hawthorne encountered entertainers on the road. One hawker had walked many miles over the thinly populated Berkshire hills to bring his hand organ and ingenious moving peepshow to the tavern in North Adams. A German carried his threadbare diorama in his wagon. For a few cents he offered "the very worst scratchings

and daubings that can be imagined" of European cities ancient and modern, updated with scenes from the Napoleonic wars. The local farmers enjoyed both.[12]

In rural areas like western Massachusetts, where there were few large towns to support commercial entertainment, traveling shows needed very broad appeal to be successful. Performers had to be versatile. John Durang, one of the stars of the early circus, was a dancer, actor, clown, singer, tightrope walker, puppeteer, scene painter, and equestrian performer. He recalled that during a tour of Lower Canada with John Bill Ricketts in 1797, besides participating in stunts of all kinds on horseback: "I dancet on the stage, I was the Harlequin in the pantomimes, occasionally I sung a comic song. I tumbled on the slack rope and performed on the slack wire. I introduced mechanical exhibitions in machinery and transparencies. I produced exhibitions of fireworks. In short, I was performer, machinist, painter, designer, music compiler, the bill maker, and treasurer."[13]

Six years later Durang led his own small company by wagon through the towns of southern Pennsylvania and Maryland. Only in the largest cities of Philadelphia and Baltimore, with 41,000 and 26,000 inhabitants, did he stay for an extended period. Even then, he changed his program of song and dance, drama and opera, pantomime and farce, every day to encourage repeated visits.

Durang's versatility was typical of traveling showmen in rural America during the nineteenth century. For a generation, Hugh Lindsay combined managing a tavern and working irregularly as a clown with small circuses throughout southern Pennsylvania and adjoining states. When he joined John Miller's small "big show" and menagerie in 1823, the "business," he wrote in his memoirs, "was acting clown, singing comic songs, help to raise the canvas, [and] drive the camels after midnight from one stand to another, which averaged from 6 to 12 miles every night." Long distances between small settlements made touring unrewarding. In antebellum Missouri only bustling St. Louis had permanent professional theater; when Lexington, Boonville, and Hannibal were the only other cities with white populations greater than two thousand in 1850, troupes of players moving by boat or wagon struggled to finance their journey between the larger river towns, and avoided entirely the thinly populated central counties. To tempt adults to part with fifty cents—children and slave attendants, half price—the shows generally combined circus riding, minstrel song and humor, and a display of wild animals.[14]

Managers too gained broad experience from the traveling show, experience that shaped their plans for city playhouses. P. T. Barnum, who had been a storekeeper in Bethel, Connecticut, and in Brooklyn, was well-grounded in general salesmanship but a novice in entertainment matters. In 1835–36 he began his show business career in towns throughout the northern states by

supervising appearances of the old and garrulous Joice Heth, supposedly the slave nurse of the infant George Washington, and of an acrobat-juggler, "Signor Vivalla." It was only when Barnum joined Aaron Turner's Old Columbian Circus in April 1836 that he learned more about general theatrical management. "To me," he admitted nearly twenty years later, "this travelling and performing in canvas tents was altogether new." After six months with the troupe of thirty-five, he led his own circus—"Barnum's Grand Scientific and Musical Theatre"—with the same acrobat-juggler, a clown, a minstrel, and musicians, on a tour through the South. He profited from that experience. In May 1840, in New York's Vauxhall Garden, he put on what he described as "a variety of performances, including singing, dancing, Yankee stories, etc." In January 1842, when he opened Barnum's American Museum in New York, among its miscellaneous amusements in the Lecture Room were the staples of the traveling show: "Industrious fleas, educated dogs, jugglers, automatons, ventriloquists, living statuary, tableaux, gipsies, albinoes, fat boys, giants, dwarfs, rope-dancers, caricatures of phrenology, and 'live Yankees,' pantomime, incidental music, singing and dancing in great variety (including Ethiopians,) etc. Dioramas, panoramas, models of Dublin, Paris, Niagara, Jerusalem, etc., mechanical figures, fancy glass-blowing, knitting machines and other triumphs in the mechanical arts, dissolving views, American Indians, including their warlike and religious ceremonies enacted on the stage, etc., etc."[15]

The most successful amusement entrepreneurs after Barnum had similarly broad experience. Dan Rice began his career in 1841 by exhibiting C. S. Kise's trained "pig of knowledge," made blackface "nigero dancing and singing" his specialty, became a circus strongman ("The Yankee Samson") and a comedian renowned for his burlesqued Shakespearean repertoire ("The Yankee Jester"). In the 1850s Rice performed in more than a dozen different circus combinations, and from 1852 to 1854 he owned a dime museum, supposedly containing a hundred thousand "curiosities," in New Orleans.[16] In 1846, at fourteen, Tony Pastor was a burnt-cork minstrel singer and comic in Barnum's Museum, and brought the skills he acquired in tumbling, riding, and mimicry to several traveling circuses in the 1850s. In the 1860s he became the leading pioneer of vaudeville in New York City, and in a career as performer-manager which spanned forty years, mixed circus comic burlesques and blackface "Negro extravaganzas" with pantomime, ballet, and opera in his three-hour bill. B. F. Keith was a businessman rather than a showman in vaudeville but was well prepared for variety theater. He performed in Bunnell's and Barnum's museums in the 1860s, in circuses in the 1870s, and in 1883 opened a dime museum in Boston with the usual miscellaneous exhibits—a chicken with a human face, "Baby Alice the Midget Wonder," a mermaid, and what he claimed was "the biggest hog in America"

—and much-abridged versions of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. Buffalo Bill Cody's career in western melodrama began in city theaters in 1872, blossomed in a decade of winter touring, flourished in outdoor arenas in the 1880s, and ended in motion pictures. Informed by experience and by personal connections with successful impresarios, showmen mixed different strands of entertainment into a variety package.

Variety Entertainment

From financial necessity, city playhouses like Barnum's offered general entertainment for all tastes. "At the beginning of the nineteenth century," Lawrence Levine has pointed out, "the theater was a microcosm; it housed both the entire spectrum of the population and the complete range of entertainment, from tragedy to farce, juggling to ballet, opera to minstrelsy."[17] Managers still faced deep-seated antitheatrical sentiment from the Protestant churches. In the 1760s there had been only one small permanent playhouse in America, and Lewis Hallam's troupe of traveling players, excluded from New England, had depended on the upper classes of the middle and southern colonies and the Caribbean for patronage. After the Revolution the new states permitted public dramatic performances, and theaters were founded in the 1790s on the Atlantic seaboard, in Baltimore, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Providence, Richmond, and Charleston, and a generation later, in the western river ports of Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, Louisville, Nashville, New Orleans, and St. Louis. Theaters constructed on the English model had three distinct spatial zones for the audience, often with separate entrances and differential prices of admission. The program had to appeal to the privileged in the boxes, to the clerks, mechanics, bootblacks, and newsboys in the pit close to the stage, and to the poorest groups in the upper balconies of the gallery. Managers and actors also depended directly on the audience for "benefit" performances, where named individuals received a share of the evening's box office receipts, to augment low salaries.

Even in metropolitan centers, theaters struggled to remain solvent and had to encourage regular attendance. In Boston, America's fourth biggest city, with a population of 136,000 in 1850, Moses Kimball, the manager of the Boston Museum, needed to fill two and a half thousand seats. Because of the competition from rival, low-cost places of amusement in the city, Kimball had to offer a different program almost every evening (except Saturdays and Sundays, when, determined to maintain a high moral tone, he respected Boston's sabbatarian customs and closed the theater). From 1843 to 1863, in every season of forty weeks, the museum staged a hundred and thirty dramatic pieces, half revivals of earlier successes and the rest entirely new. In the next twenty years, the number of productions was halved, and in the 1880s dropped to only fifteen a

season. The stock company of the typical theater was small—from twelve to eighteen men, and fewer than half that number of women—but had to master tragedy, comedy, and light entertainment, often in the same evening. "There was rarely a program of a serious character that was not preceded by a farce," Boston Museum actress Kate Ryan remembered of the 1870s. The veteran comedian William Warren played nearly six hundred different roles in forty-two years at the museum, two hundred and six of them in the four seasons of 1847–51. William B. Wood listed nearly three hundred and fifty dramatic parts he played in fifty years on the Baltimore and Philadelphia stage, as well as hundreds of lesser roles, and hundreds more in melodrama, opera, farce, and pantomime.[18]

For most of the century every program in the theater was a variety show. Even the grand theaters of eighteenth-century London had surrounded solemn dramas with satirical comedy and the acrobatic turns and light musical offerings of city fairs. That legacy endured on both sides of the Atlantic. A typical evening's bill consisted of a play, usually abridged, and a comic afterpiece, with orchestral music. The play might be a Shakespearean tragedy or a contemporary melodrama, an eighteenth-century comedy or a new fairy-tale extravaganza, an opera or ballet. The melodramas that were a third of all plays performed at midcentury contained the most diverse elements. They were often vehicles for startling special effects, when stage managers conjured up sensational fires, waterfalls, volcanoes, or shipwrecks, or introduced horses, dogs, even an elephant. Entr'acte entertainment before and after the play included ventriloquists, magicians, jugglers, acrobats, dancers, minstrels, comedians, and singers of every description.[19]

George L. Fox's pantomime *Humpty Dumpty*, one of the century's most successful productions and one of the first to occupy a full evening's bill, was a variety show in miniature. As well as slapstick scenes of flying brickbats, rough-and-tumble fights, and acrobatics, it had a donkey cart and live pigs on stage, an improvised steamship, topical allusions to financial and political corruption, traditional dance that parodied the can-can, orchestral music that mixed opera and popular tunes, spectacular ballet sequences, and a concluding transformation scene of sensational visual splendor. It was, complained one critic, a "farrago of nonsense," "a medley of concert-saloon, minstrel-hall, and country circus attraction."[20] For the enthusiastic audience who flocked to more than a thousand performances of *Humpty Dumpty*, Fox's variety was a virtue rather than a vice. And mixed programs continued even in the most fashionable theater. In New York's Wallace's Theatre on Broadway and Thirteenth Street, the main attractions on May 31, 1880, were the third act of *Othello* and the second half of Dion Boucicault's comedy *London Assurance*, introduced, concluded, and linked by three brief farces.[21]

An evening bill in the Bowery Theatre in December 1832 illustrates the

odd juxtaposition of high drama and low comedy. It was, a reporter noted, an unusual and "indescribably ludicrous" scene. Junius Brutus Booth, the fiery English actor, played Richard III, but the good-natured crowd became so excited that it filled the orchestra pit and most of the stage and wings. The effect was not quite what Shakespeare intended:

> It was every thing, or any thing, but a tragedy. In the scene with Lady Anne . . . the gallery spectators amused themselves by throwing pennies and silver on the stage, which occasioned an immense scrambling among the boys, and they frequently ran between King Richard and Lady Anne to snatch a stray copper. . . . The battle of Bosworth-field capped the climax—the audience mingled with the soldiers and raced across the stage, to the shouts of the people, the roll of the drums, and the bellowing of the trumpets; and when the fight between Richard and Richmond came on, they made a ring round the combatants to see fair play, and kept them at it for nearly a quarter of an hour.

When Thomas D. Rice, the best-known minstrel of the day, appeared on the bill later that evening, the spectators were so delighted with his grotesquely comic dance that they made him repeat his "Jim Crow" song twenty times.[22]

Americans had a penchant for burlesque productions that bridged highbrow and lowbrow tastes and transformed tragedy into comedy. If William Mitchell introduced the parodies popular on the London stage to the Bowery's Olympic Theatre in the 1830s, minstrel troupes added some of the nonsensical carnival spirit that pervaded the rowdy street parades. Comical minstrel burlesques of political oratory and erudite lectures mocked genteel pretension. Travesties of Italian opera were especially in vogue. Most assumed close knowledge of the music and plot of the originals. In the wake of Bellini's *La Sonnambula*, the ever-astute P. T. Barnum commissioned *The Sleep Walker*, described by one critic as "a dark version, . . . with a choice selection of music from that and other popular operas, and the favorite Ethiopian melodies."[23] There were humorous allusions to the American scene, sometimes adaptations of Shakespeare, sometimes skits on national peculiarities. *Po-ca-hon-tas, or, The Gentle Savage* (1855) by John Brougham, the master of dramatic burlesque, poked fun at the solemn verse of Longfellow; as Powhatan's associates, it had Kros-as-kan-be, Oso-char-ming, Lum-Pa-Shuga, and as medicine men, Kal-o-mel and Kod-liv-Royl. By the late 1860s the elaborate and ludicrous burlesques of Lydia Thompson's troupe filled most of the New York and Boston theaters. "Respecting nothing—neither taste, propriety, virtue, nor manners," *Appleton's Journal* complained, the British Blondes and their American imitators were determined "to throw ridicule on gods and men—to satirize everybody and everything."[24] Nothing escaped satire.

The hybrid combinations of comedy and drama, and song and dance were popular because they were miscellaneous. With burnt-cork make-up as the sole unifying link, the minstrel show grouped together short comic sketches, sentimental songs, instrumental solos, and speeches that mocked genteel oratory. "Leg-show" "burlesques" of fairy tales had even less coherence. Few observers were able to detect any narrative thread in *The Black Crook,* first produced in 1866 and renowned for its gorgeous array of girls in golden shells, and dressed (or undressed) as demons and Amazons. Some later "chorus-girl" spectacles, like *Robin Hood; or, The Maid That Was Arch and The Youth That Was Archer,* were so disjointed as to be almost beyond comprehension.[25] The circus was an incongruous mix of "wild" jungle animals with acrobats, equestrians, and clowns, and added midways of sideshow "curiosities" in the 1880s. The wild west show's program of Indians on horseback and "cow-boy fun"—riding, roping, shooting, and simulated displays of hunting the buffalo—gave way in the 1890s to "rough riders" from across the globe who had no connection with "exhibitions" of the American Far West.

As big-city amusements thrived, so did rural traveling shows. After the Civil War itinerant "combination" companies brought current New York productions and sensational melodramas like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Drunkard* that became perennial favorites in the small-town "opera" halls. Tent shows with improvised stages reached more dispersed settlements.[26] In the 1880s and 1890s showmen selling patent medicine also brought variety. Their greatest attraction was offering abridged versions of all or most of the popular styles. "Nevada Ned" Oliver, one of the stars of the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company, recalled that he offered "drama, vaudeville, musical comedy, Wild West shows, minstrels, magic, burlesque, dog and pony circuses, not to mention Punch and Judy, pantomimes, movies, menageries." One branch of the Kickapoo Indians spent nine weeks at the Albany circus grounds in the summer of 1883. Every week, for ten cents' admission, the troupe of a dozen performers gave eight two-hour performances of rifle shooting, acrobatics, comedy, ventriloquism, a dog circus, and a comic afterpiece, interspersed with song and dance from the dozen Indians or lectures from Texas Charlie on the life-enhancing blessings of Indian Sagwa.[27]

However disparate variety entertainment seemed, there was cross-fertilization and fusion. The elaborate new amusement parks at New York's Coney Island, built between 1895 and 1904, exemplified that mixture. To an unsympathetic critic like James Huneker, Coney's Luna Park represented "topsyturvydom," with "the dwarfs and the dogs, the horses and the miniature railway" scrambled together in a bedlam of noisy funfair rides and lurid electric lights. Luna Park's designer Frederic Thompson had one original thought, journalist Dana Gatlin observed: he "conceived the idea of lumping together all the little, cheap concessions . . . and enclosing them, with one admission en-



A commercial stereograph of the E. and H. T. Anthony company recorded showbills near New York's City Hall Park in the 1860s, with bootblacks and newsboys in the foreground. Private collection. *American Photography in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Martha Sandweiss (Fort Worth, Tex.: Amon Carter Museum, 1991), 6.

trance," and adding "novelties" and spectacles.[28] There were familiar dime-museum sideshows of fat ladies, minstrel and vaudeville acts, moving pictures, and exotic female dancers in the Streets of Cairo. There was a three-ring circus suspended over Luna's central lagoon, elephants in the Durbar of India, and Buckskin Bill's Wild West, which offered a faint glimmer of Cody's show. However, Luna Park was also unique, with distinctive features shared by no other entertainment form. It had space—portable tents and small city theaters could not offer hundreds of thousands of electric lights, exotic sham-fairylands, vast simulated disaster epics, and the lagoon of Shoot-the-Chutes. It encouraged participation—where rival amusements generally had only passive interaction between performers and spectators, here were thrilling, vertigo-inducing rides in a walled city of fun. Thompson was convinced that patrons of amusement rides did not appreciate lessons in intellectual or moral

improvement. They left their dismal tenements not for enlightenment but for "bright days," for pleasant oblivion from daily cares. "Elaborated child's play" thrilled them. In carnival surroundings more surreal than any set designed for the conventional stage, the amusement park offered, he announced with pride, "a condensed Broadway"—"life, action, motion, sensation, surprise, shock, swiftness or else comedy."[29]

Popular Theater: English Heritage, American Enterprise

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, one significant difference between English and American variety entertainment was the predominance in England of the big-city amusement business. The English had advantages of every kind—a well-developed theatrical tradition, less intense criticism from the Protestant churches, a better-integrated system of transportation—but a more closely settled population was perhaps the most significant of all. There were traveling shows and portable theaters that generally followed circuits defined by seasonal hiring fairs and customary feast days, but Britain's large factory towns of the north and midlands also provided stable audiences for music hall and melodrama.[30] The contrast with the United States was marked. In 1800 less than 4 percent of America's population was living in centers of population greater than ten thousand. Fifty years later, when that figure had risen to 12 percent, it was still lower than the 20 percent of the population of England and Wales living in cities of that size in 1800. And by 1850, 40 percent of the population of England and Wales was congregated in the larger cities.[31] As New York became the nation's leading seaport, supplied by the Hudson River, Erie Canal, and coastal and transatlantic shipping, it also blossomed as the nation's theater capital. In 1860 its metropolitan population was only half that of London's but a million inhabitants supported twelve theaters, six lecture rooms, and several dozen exhibition halls. As the nation's urban population increased from nearly ten million in 1870 to almost forty-two million in 1910, commercial amusements also flourished, especially in the great cities.[32]

There were distinct class accents that modified the general picture of the theater as a gathering place for all classes. New York's Bowery district was the significant exception. In 1855 the humorist "Doesticks" dubbed it "the twenty-five cent area of town," "home of the unadulterated, undiluted sanguinary drama."[33] The Bowery was a thriving commercial area, processing food and producing garments, and profiting from the dockside warehouses of the nation's leading import-export emporium. By 1840 it was beginning to lose the checkerboard residential distribution of rich and poor characteristic of the early modern city; the wealthy had begun to move uptown, away from recent Irish and German immigrants. Boardinghouses provided cheap ac-

commodation for artisans, with bars and billiard rooms for male sociability. The Bowery Theatre had been built in grand style in 1826 to rival the elite Park Theatre, but within a few years, under manager Thomas S. Hamblin, it became notorious for low-priced, sensational entertainment and novelty acts. Hamblin took circus spectacles and comedy from the Bowery Amphitheatre, including Rice's minstrel song-and-dance act, and also adapted street performances from the Fulton Market nearby. William Mitchell's Olympic Theatre specialized in topical burlesques and blood-and-thunder melodramas, and he staged the early plays featuring the actor F. S. Chanfrau as Mose, the Bowery B'hoy, butcher and brawler.[34] The two outstanding early blackface troupes, the Virginia Minstrels and Christy Minstrels, gave their first performances in Bowery halls, and the Melodeon became the first specialized "Ethiopian opera house" in 1846. The theaters on Bowery and Chatham streets were never entirely working-class preserves—Aiken's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Purdy's National Theatre and George L. Fox's pantomimes in the Bowery attracted middle-class patronage in the 1850s. They demonstrated a successful formula for playhouses offering variety entertainment tailored to the needs of the locality.

The remarks of Frances Trollope and other English visitors critical of the manners of "mobocracy" at play give a misleading impression of unusually uncouth Americans. The audiences of London's cheap East End theaters, penny gaffs, and free-and-easy saloons were as boisterous and vociferous as the haunts of the Bowery b'hoys, but, like New York's popular theaters, also included the middle classes. Most Bowery melodramas were adaptations, improvisations, or imitations of popular English plays and copied their sensational style of presentation.[35] Hamblin and Mitchell, who joined the large cohort of English actors in the United States in the early 1830s, were the most successful managers of Bowery theaters. Mitchell brought the spirit and the tone of Madame Vestris's London Olympic to the Bowery's Olympic, but, like Hamblin, respected American patriotic feeling, and in his light musicals, travesties, and melodramas, he included themes familiar to the b'hoys in the pit. Mose's distinctive dress of red shirt, tall hat, high boots, his greased hair and long sideburns, and his colloquial expressions established him as the local champion who rescued damsels and dispatched villains. Mose, complained critic William K. Northall, was not merely on stage but "in the pit, the boxes and the gallery," as the respectable who once occupied the best seats shunned such "an unmitigated conglomeration of vulgarity and illiteracy."[36] Burlesques like those Mitchell staged and comedy portraying uniquely American characters helped integrate diverse themes in variety entertainment. Mose joined the pantheon of the phlegmatic Jonathan, created by George "Yankee" Hill, Nimrod Wildfire, the no-nonsense frontiersman in *The Lion of the West*, Adam Trueman, the plain-speaking yeoman in Anna Cora Mowatt's

Fashion, and the minstrel endmen who pricked the pomposity of the interlocutor. Nuances of dress and dialogue, topical references, and specific details of locations were sufficient to transform the English heritage and to identify an American hero, comical and practical, who scorned pretension and injustice.

By the early twentieth century, American inventiveness in variety entertainment began to prevail, even in England. American circuses, the minstrel show, Buffalo Bill's Wild West, and the large amusement park were exports as significant as American cotton or corn. In 1858 the British *Chambers's Journal* decried the "the age of shows," which it defined with the same broad brush as Olive Logan, as anything ranging from the Great Exhibition to "high-class" theater to "curiosities" at penny fairs, and it acknowledged Barnum as the model and master of the art of showmanship. Others denied obvious American influences. "There is nothing that American showmen have ever done that Englishmen have not done first and better," 'Lord' George Sanger boasted. He confessed, however, that when Cushing's American circus came to Liverpool in 1856, it "was to eclipse all English circuses." In response, the English circus owner created his own band of "Indians." Sensing a money-making opportunity, Sanger also put on his own "Scenes from Buffalo Bill," with a few buffalo and more fake Indians, the year before the real Cody exhibition came to England in 1887.[37] American originality was most evident in vaudeville. Although it resembled English music hall in its program of short, miscellaneous acts, it also reflected the country's unique multiethnic and racial heritage and was distinguished by its efficient management: there was no English equivalent of Keith and Albee's vaudeville empire. On both sides of the Atlantic, successful showmen based their programs on their understanding of popular taste, generally agreeing with Coney's Frederic Thompson that "child's play" and "happy days" were the essential elements.

Spectacles, Episodes, and Glad Mush

Other commentators agreed that popular entertainment lacked intellectual content. The modern theater audience, Joseph Jefferson noted with dismay in 1890, "has been accustomed to a supply of entertainments for the eye rather than for the ear." Gaudy scenery and special effects—"sugar-plums"—smothered the "daintier morsels" of dialogue well written and well delivered. For almost forty years Jefferson had given countless performances in Dion Boucicault's *Rip Van Winkle*. The nation's most respected actor had built his reputation on his convincing portrayal of the carefree young boy gradually transformed by life's experiences into the chastened and ineffectual old Rip. His delicately nuanced blend of comedy and sentiment was acclaimed as a masterpiece of subtle characterization. "There is a depth of pathos, tenderness, and

beauty that charms like music and attunes the heart to the finest sense of pity," proclaimed a typical review in 1867. Jefferson resisted all suggestions to embellish the play with "realism"—with a retinue of pipe-smoking Knickerbockers, a Dutch windmill, real cows and a dog, and the Continental army patriotic with fife and drums. As the son and grandson of actors, he was proud to be an old-style professional who had never forgotten his early tours by road and riverboat to improvised stages in an age when audiences warmed to bravura oratory and gesture and when stagecraft was rudimentary. Those days, he declared, were now past.[38]

There was general consensus among early-twentieth-century critics that variety entertainment, regardless of the specific form, was trivial nonsense. Clayton Hamilton agreed with Jefferson that the modern drama "makes its appeal mainly to the eye." Why was the low-priced theater so popular? dramatist Harry James Smith wondered in 1907. Why did New York "shop girls" and their "steadies" spend ten, twenty, or thirty cents of their money, earned by long hours of labor in the garment factory or behind the department store counter, in watching poor quality melodrama in the Bowery's Thalia Theater? Why did they hiss villainous rogues intent on tricking childlike innocents into white slavery, or cheer street-smart bootblacks who mocked the silver-tongued seducers? What was so fascinating about *The Way of the Transgressor*, where at the climactic moment, one trained hound untied the helpless Gracie bound to the rails while the other climbed the ladder and pulled the rope over the signal's pulley to stop the advancing locomotive in the tunnel? There was no plot, no characterization, no coherent narrative.[39]

The audience, Smith concluded, "wanted to have their emotions stirred, their blood quickened," to escape the dull drudgery of drab, ill-paid work with three hours of forgetfulness in this "house of a thousand wonders." They wanted everyday life dramatized, so that "it becomes necessary to color it up, to provide it with glamour, with mystery, with terror, and with comicality. Realism and wild romance are curiously wedded in the result." The theater gave companionship; the visitors interacted with the performers and with each other—they whispered, whistled, commented, heckled, gripped the seat in front at times of tension, and applauded what they liked. They welcomed any and all expressions of emotion that transcended the ordinary so long as the "episodes" were brief: every isolated dramatic "situation" "must come to its culmination rapidly, directly, and by means which require no thought."[40]

There were, Smith noted, only two other forms of theatrical amusements favored by the Bowery poor—"the penny-in-the-slot Arcades" and vaudeville. Of vaudeville, he wrote, "could anything be more disjointed and scattering in its make-up?" And the "automatic" slot-machine kinetoscopes, mutoscopes, vitascopes, or phonographs, popular since the 1890s, offered merely brief, frenetic peepshows without sound or snatches of song without vision. Other

commentators believed that modern amusement lacked narrative continuity. For Edwin Milton Royle vaudeville was "lunch-counter art" and, like the department store, comprised diverse elements assembled in one convenient package for city dwellers with limited time. "Vaudeville," Channing Pollock agreed in 1911, "addresses itself to amusement seekers incapable of giving, or unwilling to give, concentrated and continuous attention." Florence Sinow attributed its success to variety, editing, and fast pace, and reminisced: "the evening shifted from excitement to excitement, but—on different levels—high comedy, sophistication, slapstick, dancing, singing—sentimental—jazz—acrobats—animals—a panorama that was gorgeous, funny, tearful, each in turn—a kind of entertainment audiences could lose themselves in, individually and collectively."[41]

Modern variety amusements, the critic George Jean Nathan observed condescendingly, were merely "glad mush." Audiences did not wish to see social problems enacted on stage; they sought "life, colour, movement and gaiety"—"horse-play, belly laughter, pretty girls, ingenious scenery," "insane melodrama, lovely limbs, lively tunes, gaudy colours, loud humours, farce, flippancy, fol-de-rol." In 1913 Nathan had joined forces with George M. Cohan, the leading producer of musicals, and compiled a long list of the stage effects calculated to elicit appropriate emotional responses from those watching. For devising a successful show was an entirely predictable process, a matter of "mechanics," of applying the right formula of convention and invention. Some variant of the Cinderella story with a happy ending, he noted cynically, satisfied the great majority of theater-goers.[42]

Nathan and Cohan discussed the general techniques of theatrical production rather than its specific applications. By 1913 the legitimate theater and live drama with which they were familiar had a serious rival in moving pictures. A decade earlier, the journalist and critic Norman Hapgood dared to hope that the new "biograph" might be the salvation for the theater degraded by popular taste. If only the "spectacle-loving" masses could be diverted into "separate houses" managed by profit-hungry entrepreneurs and watch meretricious nonsense on the flickering screen, then the intellectual classes might be left alone to sponsor an "elevated" drama as culturally rich as Europe's.[43]

Illustrated Songs, Vaudeville, and the Moving-Picture Revolution

The "moving-picture revolution," popular writer Glenmore Davis declared triumphantly in 1910, "has put the biggest dent into theatricals that the amusement industry has ever received." In just two years, the movies, "an absolutely new form of popular amusement," had forced out of business cheap city melodrama houses and low-price vaudeville halls that had been the

mainstay of popular drama for more than a generation. Small-time venture capitalists had grasped the rewards of lower costs of exhibition in storefront nickelodeons and outwitted the "Broadwayites" and the syndicates that traditionally controlled theatrical entertainments. By making live performances redundant, the "man at the crank" had thrown commercial theater into crisis. It was, Davis rejoiced, "a sudden and extraordinary change."[44] A few months earlier fellow journalist William Allen Johnston reflected on the implications of moving pictures as machine-made art. "All is mechanical, abbreviated, compressed, silent," he noted. In the "new style of theater," the "new form of drama" was "inanimate, compact, machine-like." "Gone are the glamour of the footlights and the interesting little world back of the curtain, which many found more luring than the play itself."[45]

The early kinetoscopes and vitagraphs had been little more than intriguing technological novelties, but Edison projectors made moving-picture entertainment social, even sociable, when groups gathered in a darkened room. There had been significant technological innovations during the nineteenth century that enhanced theatrical performances. In private homes, gifted amateurs with the energy and resources to amuse themselves made use of the new melodeon, piano, or of magic lantern, or sheet music or one of Dick and Fitzgerald's many guidebooks on parlor games and tableaux vivants that the rotary printing press produced inexpensively by the 1850s. For stagecraft in public arenas, gas and electric lighting allowed more subtle shading in painted scenery, more varied colors in costumes, and less garish make-up for actors, as producer David Belasco made famous in his "Drama of Illusion" at the turn of the century. Drop curtains, pulleys, water tanks, reflecting plate glass, and revolving stages encouraged extravagant stage effects. City audiences expected to see volcanoes erupting, houses burning, waterfalls gushing, lightning striking, ships sailing, or horses galloping. Nevertheless, these technological novelties did not fundamentally change the face-to-face encounter between performers and spectators that was the customary means of transmitting words and images.

In his survey of the amusement business published in 1910, Robert Grau concluded that the crucial stage in the triumph of the "cinematograph" was the introduction of the illustrated song in vaudeville. Using a projector and a set of colored slides keyed to the lyrics of well-known songs, the vocalist-exhibitor encouraged his listeners to join in the chorus and to be more than mere spectators. The show became a communal process, an improvised neighborhood gathering that domesticated the new technological form of machine-produced images .[46] Siegmund Lubin was a pioneer. A manufacturer of optical instruments, Lubin saw the potential, first of photographic song slides, and soon, of projectors and moving pictures. By March 1897 he displayed his short "Cineograph" films in C. A. Bridenbaugh's Dime Mu-

seum in Philadelphia, and in 1899 he opened his special-purpose Cineograph nickelodeon.[47]

Lubin had rivals. In 1898 the Sears, Roebuck mail-order catalogue offered a complete, ready-made, commercial entertainment "outfit" for traveling showmen. It supplied phonographs, moving-picture projectors with film footage, and magic-lantern slide projectors, sets of slides, and accompanying scripts, with rolls of tickets and blank posters to announce exhibitions. Budding entrepreneurs added the talent for performing, willingness to improvise from the set programs, and flair for business. A typical concern was the Cook and Harris High Class Moving Picture Company that toured upstate New York and northern New England from 1904 to 1911. The team of four comprised Bert Cook as singer and compère; his wife, Fannie Harris, as pianist; an advance man posting bills and seeking sponsorship from local organizations; and one special-effects assistant. The troupe presented a two-hour variety show, usually for one evening only, in very small towns with a population seldom larger than two thousand. The staple program included brief vaudeville sketches mixing comedy, melodrama, and music that were supplemented by brief sequences from current films of all kinds. In his advertising, Cook emphasized the mixture of sound and vision, with piano and sound effects to complement the silent films. The films were the main attraction but the slides and songs were the connecting thread—or as their program announced, "The Monotony of a Whole Evening of Moving Pictures is Relieved by the Introduction Now and Then of Some Beautiful Illustrated Song." Contact with local residents began with negotiations between the troupe's agent and charitable concerns, continued with advertising images that featured the audience as much as the film, and culminated in joint participation in illustrated songs.[48]

In Lexington, Kentucky, a medium-sized market town of 26,000 in 1900, illustrated songs and moving pictures also augmented the standard programs of traveling showmen. At the Lexington Opera House on 15 December 1896, the visiting Holmes and Wolford Company announced a "special attraction," "The Cinematograph": "The most marvelous invention of the nineteenth century will be on exhibition showing moving pictures life-size and very natural." In between acts of *The Smugglers*, a full-length "Sensational Melodrama," the repertory company screened a dozen, very brief, flickering scenes of Paris streetcars, waves breaking on a seaside beach, and comical "pickaninnies" bathing. The movies often came again to Lexington in the two decades after 1896, as a modern feature squeezed into the programs of traveling tent shows—Chautauqua, minstrels, circus, repertory theater. Lexington was unusual because it had no successful vaudeville hall until 1907, but it had a galaxy of other commercial amusements that provided variety entertainment, including movies and illustrated songs.[49]

By 1912 Cook and Harris had abandoned traveling and turned to managing a nickelodeon in a fixed location; Lexington now had two permanent motion-picture theaters. Only a few traveling shows like Lyman Howe's survived, as ten thousand special-purpose nickelodeons appeared across the nation between 1905 and 1910.[50] In 1907, Barton W. Currie, one of the first to acknowledge the "nickel madness," saw the advantages of these "tawdry little show-places": "Melodrama is served hot and at a pace the Bowery theatres can never follow." The content was much the same as the ten-twenty-thirty "mellowdrammer" theaters, but further edited and abridged to "episodes," presented within fifteen minutes, and without the expense of live performers. And, since film was silent, the descendants of the Bowery b'hoys could enjoy "French buffoonery," courtesy of Meliès and Pathé.[51] Motion-picture distributors made strenuous efforts to encourage family attendance in special-purpose, well-designed theaters.[52]

Glenmore Davis and William Allen Johnston believed that the coming of the movies marked the end of nineteenth-century tradition in live theatrical entertainments. However, they exaggerated the immediate effect of the "moving-picture revolution." The number of traditional theaters outside the major metropolitan centers that regularly hosted productions of visiting companies dropped steadily rather than suddenly. Julius Cahn's *Official Theatrical Guide* listed 1,746 "first-class houses" in 1905. In 1910 there were 1,549, but only 674 in 1925. In the 1920s Broadway productions still flourished, but elsewhere many of the old-style theaters that survived adjusted to new circumstances by replacing serious drama with lighthearted musicals and farces, and even then often had to screen movies on Saturday evenings to boost box office receipts. Even more striking was the loss of large "combination" companies touring the country with Broadway shows—339 in 1900, 236 in 1910, 95 in 1915, but only 39 in 1920.[53] The "tommers"—the troupes that visited the most remote areas with countless versions of the perennnial favorite *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—dropped from some 500 in the 1890s to 12 in 1927.[54] By 1920 the large circuses and wild west shows were also going out of business. Between 1910 and 1930 there was a decisive shift to mechanical reproduction of sound and vision that became characteristic of twentieth-century mass culture.

One form of live entertainment thrived a while longer. In underpopulated rural areas of the South and West, where permanent movie theaters were not viable, small troupes—perhaps 400 in 1927—brought "repertoire" drama and vaudeville in tent shows in spring and summer.[55] It was traditional variety in style and content. The J. Doug Morgan show that toured the Midwest and claimed to be the "World's Greatest Tented Amusement Enterprise" saw its role as presenting "A Grand Triple Alliance of Musical Comedy, Drama, and Vaudeville."[56] In the late 1920s the tent shows faced severe competition from "canned drama," especially talking pictures, and most failed in the Depression.[57]

Show Biz Old and New

After a long and successful career in Broadway musical theater, Jack Burton looked back nostalgically on the entertainments of his youth. Born in 1885, he recalled the excitement of the numerous touring companies that came to Aurora, Illinois, en route from Chicago to St. Louis. In the 1890s, at the Coulter Opera House and its successor, the Grand Opera House, he saw a regular succession of visiting attractions—minstrels, old-fashioned melodrama, the Holden Comedy Company, even the inspirational lectures of Theodore Roosevelt—and as a college student in Chicago, vaudeville, circus, and wild west shows too. The movies that replaced Aurora's live shows in 1913 lacked color: there was no dialogue, no comic punchline, no background music, no spontaneous song. What mechanical reproduction lacked most was a true sense of drama. The movies could not recapture a small boy's thrill of watching the bill poster announce the coming attraction, the anticipation of the grand street pageant, the unexpected improvisation on familiar themes. Recorded sound and vision lacked immediacy, intimacy, and spontaneity. In the opera house "homemade music" had blended with professional and amateur plays, church festivals, club pageants, and high school graduations graced the stage in the intervening weeks. Compared with the "road shows," the early movies were modern versions of peepshows—silent, remote, lacking the human warmth of direct engagement and empathy—and they were in black and white.[58]

THE DIME MUSEUM

Of the many "museums" on New York's Broadway and the Bowery, with ill-sorted collections of "curiosities," none was more renowned than Barnum's. From 1842 to 1868 Phineas Taylor Barnum's American Museum was the best-known "Congress of Wonders," an eclectic mix of enlightenment and entertainment to please both the many and the few. It was a minstrel hall and an art gallery, a repository of natural history and a theater for melodrama, a waxworks house of horrors and a collection of technological marvels. Barnum's pioneered the amusement business: it presented moral uplift with melodramatic publicity and wrapped sensational plays in sentimental rhetoric and polite decorum. There, the scientific and the sham enticed those enthralled by the diversity of the modern city, by its contrapuntal rhythms and contrasting experiences. Like other city dime museums, Barnum's offered teasing spectacles and fascinating puzzles served up with modern panache.

It was the display of "living curiosities"—the fat and the thin, giant and dwarf, real or fake—that distinguished Barnum's Museum from the other palaces of pleasure in the city. The novelist Henry James remembered its advertising "spurious relics and monsters in effigy, to say nothing of the promise within of the still more monstrous and abnormal living."[1] Some, like university professor Henry P. Tappan, scorned it as "a mere place of popular amusement." In 1852 he wrote that in America a museum was "a place for some stuffed birds and animals, for the exhibition of monsters, and for vulgar dramatic performances." In London, by contrast, the British Museum was an outstanding repository of art and science. Intellectuals often admired the dime museum's "scientific" menagerie of exotic animals, and sometimes acknowledged the worth of cases of geological specimens or flora and fauna gathered from afar; they usually disparaged the abnormal animal and human "curiosities" as crowd-pleasing and money-making distractions. However, Tappan's transatlantic comparison was overdrawn. London, with a larger population and a longer tradition, did have more specific sites for different forms of entertainment—for waxworks, for panoramas, for mechanical marvels. How-

ever, miscellaneous amusements gathered in one building were very common, even in England. In May 1846 the Egyptian Hall, London's premier venue, displayed at the very same time, Barnum's Tom Thumb, George Catlin's Indian Gallery, and the mawkish paintings of Benjamin Haydon. "Museums" in all cities in all nations in the early nineteenth century contained, as English visitor Isabella Bird observed of Barnum's in New York, both scientific objects of "real interest" and "spurious and contemptible" "monstrosities" fit only for the "vulgar gaze."[2]

"Living curiosities" were, Barnum proclaimed, "representatives of the wonderful."[3] In a Protestant country that cast doubt on the theater as an institution fit only for slothful men and filled with sinful women, the museum, Barnum insisted, exhibited God's mysterious creation for all to ponder —and enjoy. His most celebrated human "curiosities" were not mute waxworks but extraordinary living "wonders" who communicated with visitors and transformed passive viewing into an interactive experience. "Curiosities" made Barnum's reputation (or notoriety) as a loveable rogue and hoaxer. In 1835–36 he toured with the crippled Joice Heth, supposedly the ancient slave nurse of George Washington. In late 1842 he discovered the two exhibits that transformed his career. The Fejee Mermaid might be inanimate but Barnum's extensive publicity made the exotic half-monkey, half-fish another "missing link" demanding close scrutiny. Tom Thumb became not merely another midget exhibited but an entertainer whose burlesqued roles and repartee made him a charming companion as well as liminal "man-child" testing the borderlines between childhood innocence and adult knowingness. "Col. Frémont's Nondescript or Woolly Horse," supposedly found in 1849 during the explorer's expeditions in the Rocky Mountains, was typical of Barnum's stunts. Culture-seekers hoped it was a New World creature unknown to science; sensation-seekers enjoyed the jape with the beast with curly hair; all paid their twenty-five cents for admission. That was Barnum's genius.

During the Mexican War, Herman Melville wrote a series of short essays mocking the heroics of General Zachary Taylor. In the new humorous magazine *Yankee Doodle*, he mused how an astute showman might thrill the public eager for any contact with the all-conquering American warrior, by exhibiting curios which had "almost" been touched by the humble victor. Eventually, after touting for suitable relics, the impresario offers General Taylor a personal appearance alongside "General" Tom Thumb, "where you will be associated with all that is curious in nature and art, you will enjoy the society of a General almost as famous as yourself."[4] Who else would Melville choose as the people's showman-champion but Barnum?

Early Museum Shows

Ethan Greenwood was a typical showman-entrepreneur of the early nineteenth century. In 1818 he abandoned a career in portrait painting. For the next twenty years, he owned and managed the New England Museum and Gallery of Fine Arts in Boston and two other museums in Portland and Providence. Much of his time was spent in purchasing items for the collections, arranging for taxidermists to mount fish and animals, advertising in the local press, and traveling from Boston to Maine and Rhode Island. The staples of all his museums were the wonders of nature, preserved or sometimes live, waxworks, and fine art, supplemented by occasional special attractions like the "Wonderful dwarf," hired for a few weeks. Ethan Greenwood's journal for June 1824 outlined his activities.

Georgia Brady Barnhill, "'Extracts from the Journals of Ethan A. Greenwood': Portrait Painter and Museum Proprietor," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 103 (1993): 166–67.

June 1st., 1824. A Mermaid arrived here last week & I agreed to exhibit it. Busy setting up Shark.

2nd. Purchased some Indian Curiosities.

3rd. Bought four figures of an Italian $4.00.

5th. Bought four Busts of Voltaire, filling up jars of reptiles. . . .

7th. Artillery Election good run of business & in the eve a 'Glorious House' $342.75. Best day since the Museum began.

10th. Bought a young Shark.

12th. Preparing articles for Portland, closed exhibition of the Vampyre [of the Ocean (bought three weeks earlier for $150 in cash)].

14th. Dexter with his hand cart moved the Linnean Coll. After the Museum we rallied 15 men and removed the Vampyre into the lower hall of the Museum, this was a heavy job & took nearly 2 hours.

18th. Got ready to go to Portland. . . .

19th. Went on board at daylight & arrived in Portland on the 20th . . . . Last Friday I bought the Egyptian Mummy together with the cases & c for $350.00.

23d. Got out bills for the Mummy exhibit. . . .

26th. Went on a boat to Peake Island, & got 2 jaw bones of a Whale 14 feet long, out in a violent storm, got wet, & at one time in great danger. Put one bone in Museum here, & the other on board for Boston.

27th. On board Sloop for Boston.

Salem was one of the major seaports of the early republic; shipping generally, and especially the import-export trade with China and the East Indies, made it one of the wealthiest small cities in the country. On the Fourth of July

1838, Nathaniel Hawthorne recorded his impressions of his visit to temporary sideshows on Salem common.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Hawthorne's Lost Notebook, 1835–1841*, ed. Barbara S. Mouffe (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), 66–69.

A very hot, bright sunny day; town much thronged. Booths on the common, selling gingerbread &c. sugar-plums and confectionery, spruce-beer, lemonade. Spirits forbidden, but probably sold stealthily. On the top of one of the booths a monkey, with a tail two or three feet long. He is fastened by a cord, which, getting tangled with the flag over the booth, he takes hold and tries to free it. The object of much attention from the crowd, and played with by the boys, who toss up ginger bread to him which he nibbles and throws down again. He reciprocates notice of some kind or other, with all who notice him. A sort of gravity about him. A boy pulls his long tail, whereat he gives a slight squeak, and for the future elevates it as much as possible. Looking at the same booth by and bye, find that the poor monkey has been obliged to betake him self to the top of one of the wooden joists that stick up high above.—Boys going about with molasses candy, almost melted down in the sun.—Shows, a mammoth rat; a collection of pirates, murderers &c. in wax. Smell of cigars, from Spanish down to immense long nines, smoking among the crowd. Constables in considerable number, parading about with their staves, sometimes communing with each other, producing an effect by their presence without having to interfere actively. One or two old salts or others rather the worse for liquor; in general people very temperate. At evening the aspect of things rather more picturesque; some of the booth keepers knocking down the temporary structures, and putting the materials in wagons to carry away; other booths lighted up; and the lights gleaming through rents in the sail-cloth top. Customers rather riotous, yet funny, calling loudly and whimsically for what they want,—young sailors &c; a young fellow and a girl coming arm in arm; perhaps two girls approaching the booth, and getting into conversation with the he-folks thereabout, while old knowing codgers wink to one another thereby indicating their opinion that these ladies are of easy virtue.—Perchance a knock-down between two half-stewed fellows in the crowd—a knock-down without a heavy blow, the receiver being scarcely able to keep his footing at any rate. Shoutings and hallooings, laughter,—oaths—generally a good-natured tumult; and the constables use no severity, but interfere, if at all, in a friendly sort of way. Talk with one about how the day has past, and bears testimony to the orderliness of the crowd, suspects one booth of selling liquor, relates one scuffle &c.—Perhaps a talkative and witty seller of gingerbread &c, holding forth to the people from his cart, making himself quite a noted character by his readiness of remark and humor; and selling off all his wares.—Late in the evening, during the fire works, people consulting how they are to get home, many having long miles to walk; a father with wife and children, saying it will be 12 °clock before they reach home, the children being already tired to death;—girls going home with their beaus; may they not linger by the wayside. The moon beautifully dark bright, not giving so white a light as

sometimes. The girls all look beautiful and fairy like in it, not exactly distinct, nor yet dim. The different character of female countenances as observed during the day—mirthful and mischievous, slyly humorous, stupid &c.; looking genteel generally, but when they speak, often betraying plebeianism by the tones of their voices—Two girls on the common very tired—one a pale, thin, languid looking creature; the other plump, rosy, rather over-burdened with her own little body. Conversation of the various groups.

Gingerbread figures in the shape of Jim Crow, and other popularities.

A little more than a week later, on July 13, 1838, Nathaniel Hawthorne visited a small waxworks sideshow in Salem. This was a house of horrors. Lurid narratives of execution sermons had been popular in eighteenth-century New England, and cheap bestsellers like *The Female Marine* (1815) added pirates to the constellation of evil-doers. The showmen kept representations up to date, with Chang and Eng, the Siamese Twins, first exhibited in the country in 1829. The most glamorous attraction was the wax figure of Helen Jewett, a young prostitute of respectable background murdered in New York on April 9, 1836. The subsequent trial and acquittal of Richard Robinson had kept the penny press enthralled for several months, largely because of revelations about the dark secrets of fashionable society and rumors of a cover-up. The wax museum in Salem, admission twenty-five cents, was a sideshow attached to the "National Menagerie" of June, Titus and Company, which toured New England in the early 1830s.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Hawthorne's Lost Notebook, 1835–1841*, ed. Barbara S. Mouffe (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), 75–77.

A show of wax figures, consisting almost wholly of murderers and their victims;—Gibbs and Wansley the Pirates; and the Dutch girl whom Gibbs kept and finally murdered. Gibbs and Wansl[e]y were admirably done, as natural as life; and many people, who had known Gibbs, would not, according to the showman, be convinced that this wax figure was not his skin stuffed. The two pirates were represented with halters round their necks, just ready to be turned off; and the sheriff behind them with his watch, waiting for the moment. The clothes, halters, and Gibbs' hair, were authentic. E. K. Avery and Cornell, the former a figure in black, leaning on the back of a chair, in the attitude of a clergyman about to pray;—an ugly devil, said to be a good likeness. Ellen Jewett and R. P. Robinson;—she dressed richly in extreme fashion, and very pretty; he awkward and stiff, it being difficult to stuff a figure to look like a gentleman. The showman seemed very proud of Ellen Jewett, and spoke of her somewhat as if this wax figure was a real creature. Strang and Mrs. Whipple, who together murdered the husband of the latter. Lastly the Siamese Twins. The showman is careful to call his exhibition the "*Statuary*"; he walks to and fro before the figures, talking of the history

of the persons, the moral lessons to be drawn therefrom, and especially the excellence of the wax-work.

He has printed histories of the personages for sale. He is a friendly, easy-mannered sort of a half-genteel character, whose talk has been moulded by the persons who most frequent such a show—an air of superiority of information, a moral instructor, mingled with a good deal of real knowledge of the world. Inviting his departing guests to call again and bring their friends. Desiring to know whether they are pleased. Telling that he had a thousand people the 4th of July, and that they were all perfectly satisfied. Talking with the female visitors, and remarking on Ellen Jewett's person and dress to them—he having ''spared no expense in dressing her,'' and all the ladies say that a dress never sat better; and he thinks he never knew a ''handsomer female.'' He goes to and fro, snuffing the candles, and now and then holding one close to the face of a favorite figure; ever and anon, hearing steps upon the staircase, he goes to admit a new visitor. The visitors, a half bumpkin, half country-squire like man, who has something of a knowing air, and yet look and listens with a good deal of simplicity and faith, smiling between whiles;—a mechanic of the town;—several decent-looking girls and women, who eye Ellen Jewett with more interest than the other figures, all women having much curiosity about such ladies;—a gentlemanly sort of person, who looks somewhat ashamed of himself for being there, and glances at me knowingly, as if to intimate that he was conscious of being out of place; a boy or two; and myself, who examine wax faces and flesh ones with equal interest. A political or other satire might be made, by describing a show of wax figures of the prominent public men; and by the remarks of the showman and the spectators, their characters and public standing might be expressed.

In the early nineteenth century, the general-purpose exhibition hall reigned supreme. In Philadelphia, Charles Willson Peale lobbied in vain for government subsidy from Congress for his collections of original art and natural history. When attendance fees from middle-class visitors failed to meet expenses, he tried more sensational exhibits and more aggressive publicity, but with limited success. Rubens Peale modified his father's formula of "rational amusement." He diluted the informative, scientific content by adding more musicians, magicians, and performing animals—and in his New York museum in the late 1820s, a calf with two heads, six legs, and two tails as well as Indians and two fat girls. Even so, even in the 1840s, when sensational novelties and nonsensical minstrel songs were more of a draw than Egyptian mummies and prehistoric mastadons, the museum-going public still expected a modicum of genuine knowledge on display, and all proprietors displayed fossils as well as fat boys.

In 1871 Abram C. Dayton wrote a nostalgic memoir about the "Knickerbocker" New York of his youth. It was a romantic tale of village-like intimacy

ruined by class-embittered migrants and immigrants who had made the city ungovernable. Barnum was a symbol of this declension to a mercenary age. In the early nineteenth century, two cultural institutions had been outstanding: the old American Museum operated by the taxidermist John Scudder until his death in 1821 and by then by trustees, and Peale's New York Museum. When Barnum acquired them by devious means in 1841 and 1843, he sensed a market for "pious dollars," and lured the middle-class public with "high moral dramas" in the "Lecture Room." Barnum's hype and humbug, sharp practices, and sensational monsters, replaced genuine, old-fashioned, scientific emporia.

Abram C. Dayton, *Last Days of Knickerbocker Life in New York* (New York: George W. Harlan, 1882), pp. 142–45.

Both of these establishments were real museums, . . . clean, silent, systematic places for serious contemplation, and the study of the wonders and eccentricities of nature. Children on crossing the thresholds of these temples dedicated to science were awe-stricken by the sight presented, and clung tremblingly to their grandmothers for protection while gazing upon the trophies which had been culled from every nook of the civilized and barbarian world. These museums would have been pronounced duplicates by a casual observer. Each had on exhibition the wax presentment of Daddy [Daniel] Lambert, and this historic fat man was caged by well authenticated representations of heroes, criminals and murderers, whose romantic or villainous deeds had long been immortalized in nursery rhyme; so this wax department, when each figure had been pointed out and duly described by grandmother, was a grand attraction to youthful pilgrims in search of knowledge. Next in order of interest came the horrible boa constrictors, who were cruelly fed before our eyes with innocent live chickens and rabbits. During the process of his snakeship's meal the ears of the terrified young ones were wide open to listen, as the bland keeper gave an accurate statement as to what these monstrous reptiles would do if they had the chance, and we timidly calculated in primary rules of arithmetic what power of resistance the slim wire bars could offer should the boa resolve to change his steady diet and try a taste of baby by way of variety. So we slunk away from possible danger to feast our eyes upon the benign countenance of the Father of his Country, satisfied from early education that even his features on canvass were a sure protection against all assailants.

The portrait of Washington was surrounded by a bevy of notables: Napoleon, Franklin, Penn, Christopher Columbus, Jefferson, Madison, Sir Walter Raleigh, Queen Elizabeth, &c., backed up by way of nationality by the imaginary heads of Indian chiefs, who massacred and scalped our forefathers and *fore*mothers with their innocent babes, who had never done them any harm except to give them *fire water* and glass beads for their lands and rich furs. Next came a wonderful mummy, with the precise date of its sepulture marked on a piece of parchment, yellow with time or by reason of some chemical appliance. Indian war clubs, bows and arrows of curious workman-

ship, canoes of bark and hide, scalps of unfortunate pilgrims, dried bones of all sizes and shapes, ostrich eggs suspended from the ceiling, old pennies arranged in glass cases, a piece of the frigate Constitution, the signature of John Hancock, some specimens of Continental money, but any quantity of large and small stones duly labeled and designated in a body as *the Cabinet of Minerals,* over which our elders lingered long, and expatiated in grateful terms on the enterprise of the proprietor who gave them such a rare scientific treat at so little cost, *i.e.*, twenty-five cents, children half price. . . .

Each of these museums prided itself upon the attractions offered by its Lecture Room, where at a stated hour in the afternoon and evening an enthusiastic professor of something would learnedly hold forth on a subject about which he knew but little, but well aware of the fact that his slim audience knew less if possible. . . . But neither Scudder nor Peale confined themselves to dark-lantern *isms;* they did not pay in those hard-working practical days, when people gave a wide berth to everything which did not commend itself to sound common sense, so they were compelled to cater to that large class, who while they enjoyed occasional amusement, had been educated to the belief that the *theater* was *"the gate of hell."*

Selling and Seeing Curiosities

Barnum's American Museum faced strong competition from rivals in New York. By 1850 there were six theaters, four summer pleasure gardens, and more than sixty other amusement halls serving a population of nearly half a million. Part of Barnum's strategy was to offer more of everything, instructive and amusing. In the 1840s he greatly enlarged Scudder's rather shabby collection of curiosities of nature, added waxworks and copies of European art, purchased more space for a large menagerie and an aquarium, and increased the capacity of the Lecture Room to three thousand. With the pious rhetoric that so offended Abram Dayton, he touted his theatrical melodramas as "family" shows, morally elevating, for "all those who disapprove of the dissipations, debaucheries, profanity, vulgarity, and other abominations, which characterize our modern theatres."[5] The museum soon became a vast treasure-house of miscellaneous items, a department store of entertainment to rival A. T. Stewart's nearby marble-palace emporium of dry goods. The impact was often of a bewildering jumble. The satirist Mortimer Thomson described the collection "all mingled, mixed, and conglomerated, like a Connecticut chowder," with "bears, reptiles, reprobates, bugs, bulls, bells, bats, birds, petrifactions, putrefactions."[6]

However, the American Museum differed from its predecessors more in presentation than contents. In 1849 Barnum sponsored a twenty-four page illustrated pamphlet, costing twelve and a half cents, to promote the American Museum to family visitors. In it, Uncle Timothy Find-Out gives his two

BARNUM'S AMERICAN MUSEUM.

Of this magnificent establishment, embracing among its

SIX HUNDRED THOUSAND CURIOSITIES,

all that is rare and wonderful in the world of nature, or unique and striking in the world of art, it may be said in the words of Campbell;

> "For *this* has science sought on weary wing,
> By shore and sea each mute and living thing."

The Agents of the manager in all parts of the world, have instructions to spare neither labor nor expense, in adding *new wonders* to the exhibition, constituting as it does the

FOCAL POINT OF ATTRACTION,

TO THE LOVERS OF

RATIONAL AMUSEMENT,

FROM EVERY SECTION OF THE UNION.

Here, moulded in

LIFE-LIKE WAX,

the expressive facsimile of humanity—the HORRORS AND PENALTIES OF INTEMPERANCE are illustrated;

Celebrated Characters of the Old World and the New,

identical with the originals, in form, feature, attitude, and dress, seem in the act of introducing themselves to the spectator; while

The Solemn History of Christ,

from his birth to his betrayal and condemnation, is imbodied with extraordinary fidelity, in over one hundred life-size specimens of

SCRIPTURE STATUARY.

The walls of the immense pictorial saloon are surrounded with an

INTELLECTUAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN SAGES,

PHILOSOPHERS, PATRIOTS, AND HEROES,

painted by the first Artists. The *Cosmoramas and Dissolving Views*, present a grand *coup d'œil* of the great Cities, and remarkable Scenery of both hemispheres; brilliant Experiments in Natural Philosophy delight the eyes and inform the minds of the curious; and the VAGARIES of NATURE in the human family are displayed in the towering proportions of GIANTS AND GIANTESSES, the minute forms of almost MICROSCOPIC DWARFS, the huge bulk of MAMMOTH BOYS, and in that extraordinary specimen of *magnified humanity*, the MAMMOTH LADY.

The inside cover of *Sights and Wonders in New York; including a description of the mysteries, miracles, phenomena, curiosities, and nondescripts, contained in that congress of wonders, Barnum's Museum* (1849) listed the major attractions. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

young nephews a guided tour, describing the main exhibits. He outlines Barnum's motto—"LOVE GOD AND BE MERRY"—ending with a homily: "Prosecute faithfully, as Mr. Barnum has done, the duties that fall to your lot; be vigilant, active, and industrious, as he has been; and, with the smiles of Fortune, you will find your highest hopes crowned with success." The pamphlet outlined the charms of the Museum.

Sights and Wonders in New York: including a description of the mysteries, miracles, marvels, phenomena, curiosities, and nondescripts, contained in that great congress of wonders, Barnum's Museum . . . (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1849), inside back cover, and pp. 1–2.

Creation's wonders sought from pole to pole,
Mingle and meet at this their common goal,
Here, twice the measure of a five-foot staff,
Towers that FOUR-FOOTED GIANT, the GIRAFFE
There fiercely glare within their windowed dens,
Life-like, though dead, the forests' denizens.
The quaker pair, of giant bulk and stature,
Formed (as the poet says), ''to meet 'by Nature,' ''
Move through the spacious halls with stately mien,
Beside the FAIRIES' LILLIPUTIAN QUEEN.
A contrast this that all strange contrasts clinches,
Full twice EIGHT FEET, to barely twice TWELVE INCHS
Falstaff, that ''tun of man,'' of size uncommon,
Is here outweighed by HALF A TON OF WOMAN;
And those BIG BUOYS, placed where our channel's bad,
Are far out-girded by each MAMMOTH LAD.
FIGURES OF WAX with more expression rife,
Than that Prometheus kindled into life,
With startling truth embody to the eye,
The solemn scenes of SCRIPTURE HISTORY,
Or the MAD DRUNKARD'S DOWNWARD PROGRESS show,
A life of riot, and a death of wo.
Those MOVING FIGURES on a smaller plan,
And the MECHANIC COUNTERFEITS OF MAN.
They write, dance, vault—they *all but* speak and sing,
By the omnipotence of wheel and spring,
And with the MONKEYS—almost human wise,
Divide the applause, the laughter, the surprise,
Now from the LECTURE-ROOM'S AMUSEMENT CALL,
Summons the votaries to her LIGHTED HALL;
HUMOR aloft on the proscenium springs,
And waves his sceptre as each favorite sings;

While LAUGHTER holds his shaking sides in pain,
At WESTERN jokes in Gen'*wine* EASTERN strain.
Room for a *troupe* whose equal seldom met is,
Room for those prodigees the Marinettis!
Backward from stilts they bound, you scarce see where,
They vault, they lean, they whirl round in the air;
On bottles piled in pyramids they climb,
Or charm all eyes with matchless pantomime.
These, with more marvels than there's space to name,
From each spectator admiration claim,
This you'll acknowledge when you call to see 'em,
At Barnum's great American Museum.

Open every day in the year, except the Sabbath, from 7 o'clock, A.M. till 10 P.M. Such regulations are established and enforced, as render it perfectly safe and pleasant for LADIES and CHILDREN to visit the Museum in the daytime though unaccompanied by gentlemen. Exhibitions and Performances in the Lecture Room TWICE *every Day,* and oftener on Holydays.

The Price of Admission to the whole Museum, including the Entertainments, in the Lecture Room and all, is only TWENTY-FIVE *Cents.*

Children under 10 years of age Half Price.

The doggerel verse lauded the marvels of the natural world found inside:

Reader, pray lend me your attention,
While with much brevity I mention
Some of the wonders of creation,
Scattered throughout every clime and nation.
Of every other quadruped
The elephant stands at the head;
All other beasts that roam the field,
To him in bulk and strength must yield.
Then comes the huge rhinoceros,
With elk, and gnu or hornéd horse;
The tall giraffe and buffalo,
And camels which o'er deserts go;
The llama, zebra, deer, and goat,
And swiftly-bounding antelope;
And monkeys so much like a man,
Especially the orang-outang!
Lions, tigers, leopards rare,
The grizzly and the polar bear;

Panthers, hyenas, wolves, and foxes,
Such as are kept in cage or boxes;
Sable, ermine, marten, lynx,
Beaver, otter, muskrats, minks.
And birds that are in every land,
From Alpine rocks to desert sand:
The ostrich, eagle, vulture, hawk,
And crane with legs too long to walk;
Likewise swans, both black and white,
And paroquets with plumage bright;
And every kind of singing-bird
That eye hath seen or ear hath heard:
All fish that in the ocean swim,
From monstrous shark to herring trim;
Whale, walrus, porpoises, and seals,
And spurious ones, like snakes and eels!
The ichneume and crocodile,
Found near the banks of Egypt's Nile;
Serpents and reptiles, insects, all,
That walk or swim, or fly or crawl;
Choice specimens of antique art
From Pompeii's long-buried mart;
Or mummy, long in darkness hid
In catacomb or pyramid;
Or works of yet more modern dates,
From foreign climes or our own states—
As marble statue, plaster bust,
Armor of steel unsoiled by rust;
Portraits of great and noble men—
Columbus, Franklin, Howard, Penn,
Or of the great illustrious one,
Our own belovéd Washington
All these, and hundreds yet untold,
Which scarcely could be bought for gold.
Are near at hand, and, would you see 'em,
Go to the "American Museum."
There P. T. BARNUM's generosity
To satisfy your curiosity,
Has gathered all—and any day,
If but two shillings you will pay,
You're freely welcome to walk in,
And each strange creature to examine.

THE DIME MUSEUM

Barnum invested heavily in advertising in the cheap daily newspapers that blossomed in antebellum cities. An 1861 notice listed the charms of the Museum to visitors from the rural outskirts.

Advertisement, *New York Tribune*, March 1, 1861.

Barnum's American Museum.
Advice Given Gratis.
Peleg Pettinghame, in Town, to Timothy Touchmenot, in the Country.

When you to New-York City come, for pleasure or for pelf,
Just visit Barnum's Museum before you homeward turn.
"To see is to believe," you know; if witnessing yourself
The wonders of this unique show, the knowledge you thus learn
Will serve you in the days to come for story or for song,
When, gathered in your happy home, Time gently glides along.

For in this famous Museum are wondrous things untold,
Here, in the grand Aquaria, are fishes from all seas—
The angel fish, so beautiful in colors blue and gold;
The sticklebacks, the six-pound trout, gold-fish, or what you please;
You'll find them sportive and at play, as if in native sea
They took at ease their random way, conscious they were free.

A Black Sea Lion here is found; a Seal from Fundy's Bay;
A living Alligator, and a group of Crocodiles,
The famous Happy Family, with cats and mice at play,
While Monkeys, Owls, and Guinea Pigs, provoke a thousand smiles.
Here instinct seems herself at fault—opposing natures blend;
An enemy without the cage, within it is a friend.
Not these alone attention draw; Figures in Wax are found;
Classic and modern; Christian Sage and Heathen of renown;
All characters whose very names have a familiar sound.
A Mummy here, a Judas there—a "Tommy" done up brown;
A John Brown or an Albert Hinks—a Lambert and his wife,
The Siamese Twins and Albert Guelph—all true to life.

Not these alone attract the eye. The living wonders cause
Astonishment to all who see. The "What Is It?" is here;
Part monkey and part man it seems, defying Nature's laws;
And the Albino Family, from the Southern Hemisphere,
With pure white skin, and with pink eyes and soft white silken hair,
Are here on exhibition, under Barnum's watchful care.

The Aztec Children you can see—strangest of all strange sights—
Like, yet unlike, the Saxon, remnants of a now lost race;
And then, (Oh! Timothy!) the Bears; each with antic that delights,
With Herr Driesbach to exhibit them; 'tis here I fail of space
To talk of all the attractions of this famed Menagerie
Of Cougars and of Bears in all their wild variety.

Then to these add the Lecture room, where Drama proudly reigns,
("The Woman in White" is now the play. Read and resolve to come.)
Where the whole corps of Artists that Barnum here retains,
Unite to entertain the crowds that fill the Museum.
And all for five-and-twenty cents; a single quarter down,
Oh, Tim! is Open Sesame to the greatest place in town.

THE DRAMA OF THE WOMAN IN WHITE
is performed THIS AFTERNOON and EVENING, at 2 and 7½ o'clock, and all the living wonders . . . are to be seen at all hours.

In late 1842 Barnum discovered in Bridgeport, Connecticut, the "Miniature Man" who made his fortune. Charles S. Stratton was four years old but only two feet in height and fifteen pounds in weight. He renamed him "General" Tom Thumb, after the legendary Tom Thumbe, a midget Knight of the Round Table in the court of King Arthur, whose exploits were part of children's storybook tradition. He added seven years to his age, billed him as English, schooled him in stagecraft and dialogue, and launched his act in December. The midget was precisely the premium he needed to enliven his staple collections of art and science, and induce patrons to make repeated visits. Barnum rotated star attractions between his museums in New York and Baltimore and, later, Philadelphia, and exchanged them with the Boston Museum, managed by his friend and associate, Moses Kimball. Barnum corresponded with Kimball about their collaboration generally and the "General" in particular.

Selected Letters of P. T. Barnum, ed. A. H. Saxon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 13–14, 15, 16, 17.

American Museum [New York], 30 January 1843
Dear Moses,

. . . I send the General to Philadelphia on *Sunday next*. I shall run on & make arrangements next Thursday. He will probably be ready for you about lst to 10th of March. In a few days I will send you some fine *lithographs* of him so that you can be giving him *notoriety*. . . .

I *must* have the fat boy or some other monster [or] something new *in the course of this week* so as t[o be] *sure* to put them in the General's place *next Monday, [?so] don't*

fail! . . . Now more about the *General.* I pay him and his father $7 per week and board & travelling expenses for all three—father, mother, & son—and I have engaged my good frie[nd] Parson [Fordyce] Hitchcock at $12 per week, board & travelling expen[ses, to go w]ith him and shew him off. . . . He will do the same at Philadelphia & Baltimore. When the Genl. goes to Boston the Parson may continue with him, or he way remain here and attend to Peale's Museum while the boy & parents go to Boston, and you pick up some genteel person in Boston to do it. Just as you please. I dare not trust my singer with him, lest he may tamper with the parents and try to hire them away. Indeed, I fear the same from any person you might employ. Hitchcock's wages may seem high, but he is genteel, industrious, and knowing the ways of the boy well; I think he will well earn all I pay him, and of course before returning from Phil. & Baltimore he will be *thoroughly rehearsed.* So do as you please about Hitchcock; only if *he* don't go to Boston, you must employ some person who won't *tamper* with his parents. . . .

Don't fail to send me *some attraction* in time for next week.

Yours forever & a day,
Barnum

New York, 5 February 1843
My dear Moses,

. . . Tom Thumb left for Philadelphia today; yesterday was his (adver[tised)] *farewell* benefit. I took *$280*! Did you ever hear the like? [The] day previous took $90 odd. . . .

By the way, [Rubens] Peale wrote me the other day to ask If I c[ould] not send him a Tom Thumb or a two-headed man or [something] to create an *excitement.* . . . I replied that I could furnish [him with a] ''beast with 7 heads & 10 horns'' at short notice, or any other [?item] that he ordered; that Tom Thumb was made to my order six [?weeks] ago, and being now *nearly new* & without a rival, he was [very] *valuable*, that I thought he could take $1200 per week in Balti[more] Museum; and that he might engage him if he gave me [?half.] I shall let him chew upon that a few days. He certainly nev[er shall] have him for less than *half*.

. . . I have sent to London for a [pony] there for sale, 30 inches high. Do you know of one not over 3 feet? [I] want it for Tom Thumb, to ride about the room on.

As ever [thine,]
Barnum

A month later, Barnum wrote to Kimball, soothing his hurt feelings and empty pockets because the attractions Barnum sent to Boston proved disappointing.

American Museum, 8 March 1843
Oh Temperance! *Oh Moses*!!!

. . . In keeping *Thumb* longer south than I expected, I keep him out of my own museum as well as yours, and if he lives you shall have him, and at a time when you

can make more money than he now could for you, and as for making *hay, excitement,* &c., it will be found an *easy* matter for you to raise an excitement on *Tommy* anytime, especially the *first* time. It hardly seems *sensible* to [go] to the expense of bringing him from the South where [he] is doing well, and then have to take him back there, perhaps in summer, when in fact *now* is the best season of the year to have him there. [?As to] the Big Boy, you may hold on to him as colla[teral] security for Tommy—or you may send him on whenever you please.

Do you want a pretty good-sized *bald eagle* skin? I bought two yesterday—shot on Long Island. . . .

As ever thine,
Barnum

After exhibiting Tom Thumb for little more than a year, Barnum took him to Europe from January 1844 to February 1847. On his return, he made the celebrity that the "General" gained in London and Paris the centerpiece of his publicity. A small, twenty-five cent souvenir booklet reintroduced Tom to the American public and lauded his unique virtues. People of abnormal appearance had for centuries attracted attention as smart court favorites or squalid fairground exhibits in Europe, but his theatrical talents and handsome features gave him advantages over midgets in rival exhibition halls. Barnum's skills of showmanship made Tom Thumb more famous than any of his peers or predecessors. "A thousand men might have taken hold of Tom Thumb and failed, but Barnum is a consummate manager in all such things," theatrical impresario William Northall wrote in 1851. "The public is lazy and will not take the trouble to seek after the curious; it must be brought right under its nose."[7] Unlike the barkers outside shabby Bowery dime museums or grubby traveling carnivals, Barnum did not summon the prurient merely to gawp at grotesque "monsters." His "human curiosities" appeared consenting and compliant, and they seemed companionable, even intimate, acquaintances. Tom Thumb could act out roles, sing, dance, appear in many guises, a manchild burlesquing conventional symbols of authority.

Sketch of the Life, Personal Appearance, Character and Manners of Charles S. Stratton, the man in miniature, known as General Tom Thumb, twenty-eight inches high, and weighing only fifteen pounds. With some account of remarkable dwarfs, giants, and other human phenomenon, of ancient and modern times. Also, General Tom Thumb's songs (New York: Van Norden and Amerman, 1847), 4–5, 7, 8–9, 11.

Many of . . . these tiny gentlemen have been much or partially deformed, and so pain has been felt whilst looking at them. But in the case of the hero of our narrative no such drawback exists, even as to the approach of a defect. All former dwarfs were, in shape as in size, far his inferiors. We now proceed to give some account of this most extraordinary human being.

GENERAL TOM THUMB

as he is best known, but whose real name is CHARLES S. STRATTON, first saw the light in the town of Bridgeport, Connecticut, U.S.A. His parents are persons about whom there exists no peculiarity, either in their mental or physical organization. At his birth, the General (for so he has been styled by the united voices of his thousands of friends and admirers) weighed nine pounds, and a half—which is far above the usual weight of children at birth, so that he bid fair to become—indeed *was* a bouncing boy. He grew, as other children do, day after day, until he attained to the age of seven months when nature put a *veto* on his further upward progress, and ordered him forever afterwards to remain in *status quo*. People, when he was twelve months' old, fancied he had never grown an inch for some time; measures (tape ones) were resorted to for the purpose of ascertaining his stationary condition; but although in *every other* respect he grew day by day, with great rapidity, never a hair's breadth more was added to his length. No longer—no shorter—no heavier—but much handsomer—a great deal sharper, and considerable stronger; this was how matters stood. His appetite increased, although his stomach refused to grow larger; he never complained of sickness, partook freely of the dishes found upon the tables of the labouring classes, enjoyed refreshing sleep, *and has always exhibited the most perfect health,* with the exception of those slight colds to which the most robust are liable. His parents have two other children, who are well-grown, interesting girls of nine and eleven years of age. In fact, there is nothing in his history or appearance, or in that of his family, which furnishes the slightest clue to the astonishing phenomena which are presented by his miniature features and frame.

That trite but expressive saying, ''He must be seen to be believed in,'' holds good in General Tom Thumb's case, for it is extremely difficult to form a proper idea of the personal appearance of this extraordinary being from descriptions, or even from drawings; all representations of him have an exaggerated appearance. The imagination cannot conceive of such extreme littleness, and we find it difficult, with the best artistic aids, to picture on the mental retina a perfect MINIATURE MAN, only TWENTY-EIGHT INCHES HIGH, perfect and elegant in his proportions, and weighing only FIFTEEN POUNDS!

When standing on the floor, or parading the room, which he does, dressed in a style of Bond-street elegance, and with all the grace, dignity and ease of a finished gentleman, his head scarcely reaches to the knees of a person of ordinary stature, and is about on a level with the seats of the chairs, sofas and ottomans of the drawing-room.

Unlike many other dwarfs, the General is exquisitely proportioned, his head being not large, but of the proper symmetry, and beautifully developed, and his hands and feet are the prettiest ever seen. His boots are perfect Wellingtons, made of the softest kid, by the most fashionable artists; his clothes are the production of the most distinguished tailors, and his gloves are of necessity furnished to order, for nothing so small and fairylike were ever before manufactured. . . . The General has a fair complex-

ion, light hair, rosy cheeks, large beautiful dark eyes, a fine forehead, a handsome mouth, and great vivacity of expression and hilarity of manner. . . .

It could not be expected that his voice would be of the full depth of manhood, this *probably never can be,* from the size of the organ; and those who have seen Major Stevens will remember that, although he is forty years old, and much larger than the General, his voice is still pitched in ''childish treble.''

In strength, activity, and vivacity, the General is remarkable. He often amuses himself by taking hold of a cane with one or both hands, and being carried about the room, which a man can easily do with one hand. He is constantly engaged in walking about, talking, and in various pastimes and employments, from early in the morning till late at night, without showing any signs of fatigue, and seems the happiest little fellow in the world.

His personations of what are conventionally termed the ''Grecian Statues,'' are among the most beautiful and wonderful portions of his performances. His ''tableau'' of Cupid, with his wings and quiver, is inimitable—his size and form being so perfect for that representation, that he looks as if he had just been removed from an Italian image-board. His ''Samson carrying off the gates of Gaza'' is a most extraordinary representation. His attitude is perfect, and the spectator for a moment loses his idea of the diminutive size of the representation of the *strong* man, so perfect is the representation. His personations of the ''Fighting Gladiator,'' ''The Slave whetting his knife,'' ''Ajax,'' ''Discobulus,'' ''Cincinnatus,'' ''Hercules with the Nemaean Lion'' &c., exhibit a correctness of attitude, and develope in his motions a firmness and strength, combined with a spirit and intelligence, which prove his age beyond all question to be as represented. At times the General dresses as a sailor, and dances a horn-pipe to perfection. Again, we find him dressed as an English Fox Hunter, with his red coat, drab breeches, and top boots, the feet of which are three inches long, and one and a quarter inches wide!!!

His personations of NAPOLEON BONAPARTE and of FREDERICK THE GREAT, are perfection itself. His Court Costumes are elegant, but dressed as a HIGHLAND CHIEFTAIN, he carries his visiters by storm. Nothing can be conceived more perfect or more lovely.

Never was a human being, of any size, ever blessed with a kinder heart, or a more excellent disposition. He never forgets an acquaintance, and cherishes his friends with the greatest affection. There is something extremely winning in his manners, and this, with his strange beauty, has made many persons, and especially ladies, so strongly attached to him as to become his almost daily visiters. Children are always delighted with him, and little girls are his especial favourites. He receives all his visiters with a cordial and courtly grace; shaking hands and kissing the ladies, which it is difficult to prevent his doing, and which he appears to enjoy, especially when done roguishly, or by stealth, with extreme gusto. . . .

It is natural to suppose that the smallness of the brain should limit the develop-

ment of his intellectual faculties; such, however, is not the case; but, from obvious circumstances, the General's education has, until recently, been neglected. There is no lack of intelligence or aptitude to learn, and the General is now advancing in reading, writing, music, &c., with every prospect of rapid proficiency.

It is gratifying to add, that the utmost care is devoted to his moral and religious education, and that his ideas regarding the Deity, and the essential requisites of the Gospel, are as lucid and correct as those of many of mature age. The General was never known to utter a falsehood, and his language is always unexceptionable. . . .

While at this popular Establishment, his levees, at all hours, were crowded with the wealth, fashion, and intelligence of the metropolis, and by thousands of strangers arriving and departing. These he welcomed in the great reception hall of the Museum, and after showing them the splendid Fountain and many thousand curiosities with which it was crowded, he appeared again on a raised platform in the Great Hall, on the third floor, where his Miniature Palace Furniture, and Equipage, caused almost as great a sensation as the General himself, and where, amid the millions of extraordinary productions of nature and art, he was still the greatest wonder.

At each performance in the splendid Exhibition Saloon, he walked upon the stage, gracefully saluting the crowded audiences, and mounted upon a chair by an assistant, sang, in a sweet voice, and with inimitable effect, a patriotic song, after which he retired, acknowledging, by frequent bows, the rapturous plaudits he never failed of receiving. A visit to the roof of the Museum, to view the city by gas or moonlight, and witness the ascension of the illuminated balloons, would close the pleasures and fatigues of one day of this strange existence. . . .

[W]e unhesitatingly declare him to be the greatest wonder of this wonderful age. Graceful, elegant, fascinating and clever. "We shall never look upon his like again." Should he live, and there is every prospect of it, he will doubtless become accomplished and brilliant, and surpass what he at present is in attainments, as much as he now does all other dwarfs who have ever lived before him. In conclusion, we know of no description so applicable to our little friend as a single line of Goldsmith's—he is, indeed,

"AN ABRIDGEMENT OF ALL THAT IS PLEASANT IN MAN."

Philip Hone, the wealthy former mayor of New York, recorded in his diary his responses to seeing Tom Thumb in the 1840s. He seems to have accepted uncritically all the claims made for the "boy wonder." Such was the midget's acclaim that Ralph Waldo Emerson went to view what he described as the "dwarf of dwarfs" in Boston in 1848. Tom Thumb was a particular favorite of the American Museum's "family" audience, a third of whom were children. On June 18, 1847, twelve-year-old Elizabeth Rogers Cabot Mason accompanied her wealthy parents to Kimball's Boston Museum and found the nine-year-old Tom Thumb (advertised as fifteen) and his tiny possessions, "cer-

tainly very remarkable," and was astonished at his doll-like size.[8] Both of Hone's visits were family outings with his wife or daughter.

Diary of Philip Hone, 1828–1850, ed. Allan Nevins, 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1927,), 2:664, 795–96.

June 12, 1843 . . . I went last evening with my daughter Margaret to the American Museum to see the greatest *little* mortal who has ever been exhibited; a handsome well-formed boy, eleven years of age, who is twenty-five inches in height and weighs fifteen pounds. I have a repugnance to see human monsters, abortions, and distortions . . . but in this instance I experienced none of this feeling. General Tom Thumb (as they call him) is a handsome, well-formed, and well-proportioned little gentleman, lively, agreeable, sprightly, and talkative, with no deficiency of intellect, as a phrenologist would certainly infer from his perfectly shaped head. At his birth he was of a proper size, but stopped growing when five months old, and is now about as large as infants usually are at that age. His hand is about the size of half a dollar and his foot three inches in length, and in walking alongside of him, the top of his head did not reach above my knee. When I entered the room he came up to me, offered his hand, and said "How d'ye do, Mr. Hone?"—his keeper having apprised him who I was. . . .

March 12, 1847 . . . My wife and I went this morning to see the celebrated Tom Thumb at the American Museum. He appears to have increased in *littleness* during his European visit. He is said to have realized by showing himself £150,000 sterling, and been kissed by a million pairs of the sweetest lips in Europe, from Queen Victoria down; and now he is making here a thousand dollars a day. He performs four or five times each day to a thousand or twelve hundred persons; dances, sings, appears in a variety of characters with appropriate costumes, is cheerful, gay, and lively, and does not appear to be fatigued or displeased by his incessant labors. He kisses the good-looking women, a favor which he does not grant indiscriminately, and in one way or another sends his audience away well satisfied, with their outlay of a quarter of a dollar each.

Few sights in New York City made a greater impression on the seventeen-year-old Mark Twain than the exhibition of the "Wild Men of Borneo." There was nothing in the small-town South quite like these "things." Brothers Hiram and Barney Davis were born in Weston, Massachusetts, in 1825 and 1827, blue-eyed and fair-skinned, the children of English immigrants, but as adults, were only three-and-a-half feet tall and mentally retarded. From 1852 showman Lyman Warner paraded them in rented halls as the missing links between men and beasts and having almost superhuman strength. Billed as Waino and Plutano, mysterious beings from the distant South Seas, and dressed in one-piece body-suits and shorts and with waist-length hair, they were exotic attractions, and in the 1860s joined Barnum.



The "Wild Men of Borneo," Hiram and Barney Davis, billed as Waino and Plutano, were first exhibited by showman Lyman Warner in 1852. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

In a letter to his mother, published a fortnight later in his local newspaper in Hannibal, Missouri, Twain described his prolonged scrutiny of the "animals."

Samuel Clemens [Mark Twain] to Jane Lampton Clemens, August 24, 1853, *Mark Twain's Letters*, vol. 1, *1853–1866*, ed. Edgar Marquess Branch, Michael B. Frank, and Kenneth M. Sanderson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 4.

I saw a curiosity to-day, but I don't know what to call it. Two beings, about like common people, with the exception of their faces, which are more like the ''phiz'' [physiognomy, face] of an orang-outang, than human. They are white, though, like other people. Imagine a person about the size of Harvel Jordan's oldest boy, with small lips and full breast, with a constant uneasy, fidgety motion, bright, intelligent eyes, that seems as if they would look through you, and you have these *things*. They were found in the island of Borneo (the only ones of the species ever discovered,) about twenty years ago. One of them is twenty three, and the other twenty five years of age. They possess amazing strength; the smallest one would shoulder three hundred pounds as easily as I would a plug of tobacco; they are supposed to be a cross between man and orang-outang; one is the best natured being in the world, while the other would tear a stranger to pieces, if he did but touch him; they wear their hair ''Samson'' fashion, down to their waists. They have no apple in their throats, whatever, and can therefore scarcely make a sound; no memory either; what transpires today, they have forgotten before to-morrow; they look like one mass of muscle, and can walk either on all fours or upright; when let alone, they will walk to and fro across the room, thirteen hours out of the twenty-four; not a day passes but they walk twenty-five or thirty miles, without resting thirty minutes; I watched them about an hour and they were ''tramping'' the whole time. The little one bent his arm with the elbow in front, and the hand pointing upward, and no two strapping six footers in the room could pull it out straight. Their faces and eyes are those of the beast, and when they fix their glittering orbs on you with a steady, unflinching gaze, you instinctively draw back a step, and a very unpleasant sensation steals through your veins. They are both males and brothers, and very small, though I do not know their exact hight. I have given you a very lengthy description of the animals, but I have nothing else to write about, and nothing from here would be interesting anyhow.

Nearly a year earlier, Sam Clemens had written a short story about a showman's duping naïve small-town hayseeds. With preacher-like dignity, the trickster tempts the unwary with the hope of seeing something suggestive—the "bony part" crossing the "rind," a euphemism for sexual intercourse. The bystanders greet the hoax with good humor, but Jim, the only one to complain, now becomes the "curiosity," and singled out for pious rebuke. Perhaps Barnum's well-known "humbugs" of Joice Heth or the Fejee Mermaid inspired this fiction. Many years later, in *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain depicted the

Duke and the King's deceiving the Arkansas hicks with "The King's Cameleopard or the Royal Nonesuch."

"Historical Exhibition—A No. 1 Ruse," *Hannibal Journal*, September 16, 1852, in *The Works of Mark Twain. Early Tales and Sketches*, vol. 1, *1851–1864*, ed. Edgar Marquess Branch and Robert H. Hirst (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 79–82.

A young friend gives me the following yarn as fact, and if it should turn out to be a double joke, (that is, that he imagined the story to fool me with,) on his own head be the blame:

It seems that the news had been pretty extensively circulated, that Mr. Curts, of the enterprising firm of Curts & Lockwood, was exhibiting at their store, for the benefit of the natives, a show of some kind, bearing the attractive title of ''Bonaparte crossing the Rhine,'' upon which he was to deliver a lecture, explaining its points, and giving the history of the piece, the price being ''one dime per head, children half price.'' Well, the other day about dusk, a young man went in, paid his dime, ''saw the elephant,'' and departed, apparently ''with a flea in his ear,'' but the uninitiated could get nothing out of him on the subject; he was mum—had seen the varmint, and that was the full extent of the information which could be pumped out of him by his enquiring friends.

Well, everybody who saw the sight seemed seized with a sudden fit of melancholy immediately afterwards, and dimes began to grow scarce. But pretty soon Jim C—, with a crowd of eager boys at his heels, was seen coming down the street like half a dozen telegraphs. They arrived at the store, gasping and out of breadth, and Jim broke out with:

''Mr. Curts—want—to see—that—show! What's—price!''

''Oh, we let boys see it at half price—hand out your five cents.''

Jim had got done blowing by this time, and threw down his money in as great a hurry as if life and death depended upon the speed of his movements, saying:

''Quick! Mr. Curts, I want to see it the worst kind.''

''Yes, Oh yes; you want to see 'Bonaparte crossing the Rhine,' do you,'' said Abram, very deliberately.

''Yes, that's it—that's what I want to see,'' said Jim, who was so anxious to see the show that he could scarcely stand still.

''Well, you shall see it,'' said the worthy exhibitor, with a wise look, at the same time dropping the five cents into the money drawer, ''and I hope by this show to impress upon your young minds, this valuable piece of history, and illustrate the same in so plain a manner that the silliest lad among you will readily comprehend it.''

The juvenile audience was now breathless with expectation, and crowded around with eager looks, and not the slightest movement on the part of the learned lecturer was overlooked by them, as he drew from a drawer a piece of bone about three inches long, and holding it up before the wondering boys, he slowly and deliberately commenced his lecture, or explanation:

''My young friends, you now perceive—''

''Yes sir,'' interrupted Jim with mouth, eyes and ears wide open.

''As I was saying,'' continued Mr. Curts, ''you now see before you the 'Bonaparte' —the'*Bony-part,*' you understand, the'*bony part'* of a hog's leg (house shakes with laughter from the crowd which had now assembled, but Jim did not join in the general merriment, but looked very sober, seeming to think there was very little about it to laugh at, at least on his side) yes, boys,'' said Abram, as grave and solemn as a judge about to pass sentence, ''this is the bony-part of a hog's leg.''

''Is—is—a—a—that all!'' gasped Jim, beginning to look blue about the gills.

''Oh no,'' said the lecturer, ''this is merely part of the exhibition,'' and he took from a shelf a piece of meat skin about as large as a piece of paper i.e. the size of a dollar bill, and presenting it to view he proceeded with the lecture.

''Now, my young hearers, this you see is the 'Rhine'—yes,'' he continued, as solemnly as before, ''this is the 'Rhine,'—properly speaking, the hog's rind—a piece of hog's rind.''

When the laugh had subsided, Mr. C. again went on with the explanation:

''Now, young gentlemen, draw near and give me your attention a moment, for this is the most interesting part of the exhibition,'' and old Abram looked and spoke, if possible, still more wise and solemn than before; then slowly passing the piece of bone back and forth across the skin, he said, ''you see, boys this is the'bony part crossing the rind,' very lucidly explained—yes, (drawing his bone across again with the most imperturbable gravity imaginable, amid the roars of laughter) this sir, is, I may be allowed to say, a *very* apt illustration of that noted event in history, 'Napoleon crossing the Rhine.' You have now learned a valuable lesson—''

''Yes!'' broke in Jim ''I have that, but it's the last one you'll ever learn me—(laughter) you're nothing but an old swindler, anyhow—(renewed laughter, which somewhat riled our hero) yes, this is a swindling shop and a swindling show, and you don't do nothing but swindle people.''

The laugh now became so universal, that poor Jim had to force a laugh and a ''don't care'' look, as he continued:

''I don't care, laugh, jest as much as you please—I ain't particular about the money, nohow: I know'd it was a swindle, 'fore I come down (a piece of knowledge which Jim, in the excitement had before unfortunately forgotten that he ever possessed,) yes I knowed it, and I jest come down for devilment—but I don't care, you can keep the money, I ain't particular about it (Jim seemed particularly anxious to impress this important fact upon the mind of the lecturer)—cause I know you need it worse'n I do, when you can swindle a feller out of it that way.''

The crowd now laughed till they were completely exhausted, and Jim's face slowly relaxed from the ludicrous expression it had worn for a time. He now looked as if he had been suddenly bereft of every relation he had in the world—his face became lengthened to an alarming extent, and upon the said countenance the most woe-begone look settled, mingled with a most ''sheep-stealing'' expression; he was now

in a profound reverie, seemingly entirely unconscious of the jeers cast at him by the company. But Abram now broke in upon his meditations, and although he too had been enjoying his joke with a hearty laugh, he immediately assumed his former solemn look and grave tone, and thus addressed the cheap-looking "seeker after knowledge under difficulties."

"Young man, you have now learned an important historical lesson, and you are no doubt well pleased with it. I am anxious, however—ahem!—I am anxious, as I before remarked, that you should be entirely satisfied with the exhibition—if you did not understand it in its minutest details—if the illustration was not sufficiently lucid, and everything has not been exhibited to your entire satisfaction, I beg of you, my friend, to make it known; and if it has met with favor in your eyes, I shall hold myself under the greatest of obligations, (with a profound bow,) if you will use your influence in forwarding the cause of learning and knowledge, (another bow,) by inviting your friends to step in when they pass this way. What, may I ask, is your opinion of the exhibition?"

Poor Jim! He seemed not to have heard a word that had been spoken; but, with his eyes bent steadfastly upon some object that wasn't there, he moved not a muscle for the space of a minute, when, opening his lips, he slowly ejaculated the few, but significant words "Sold!—cheap - - - as - - - dirt!"

And striding out of the house he marched down the street in a profound fit of mental abstraction.

Since the above occurrence, if any one speaks to Jim, or asks him a question, he merely mutters "Bonaparte crossing—sold!"

Mr. Curts told one of Jim's companions to say to him, that his exhibition was merely an agency—that a noted wholesale firm of this city were the proprietors of the concern, that the apparatus belonged to them, that if Jim did not think his money well spent, they would in all probability refund it—but that being himself merely an agent, he did not feel authorized to do so.

W. EPAMINONDAS ADRASTUS BLAB.

Not everyone enjoyed what the English satirical magazine *Punch* derided in the 1840s as "Deformito-mania" promoted by the "monster-mongers." Horace Greeley liked and respected Barnum, but so many of the cheap dime museums in the Bowery and on Broadway fell short of his high-minded reform principles. In his newspaper editorial he scoffed at the fashion for storefront coffin displays and the singularly unpleasant and unedifying exhibitions of the "monstrous" that he believed so characteristic of New York City.

"Disgusting Exhibitions," *New York Tribune*, September 22, 1853, 4.

It would really seem that a portion of the community are only fully satisfied with the monstrous. In the matter of good exhibitions it is not sufficient that they bristle in the City, the spoils of Europe, artistically speaking, being laid at our feet . . . ; it is not sufficient that name what science or art we may, it has an exponent in some shape or

other easily open to investigation; it is not sufficient that if the denizen of the City be weary of brick-walls, the dashing speed of our present mode of travel will place him in a few minutes in the country. All these sights and sounds are insufficient to please respectively the eye and ear and nurture the taste. The normal and beautiful are inadequate; the natural and hideous must be called into view.

Hence it is that Broadway is never without one or more damnable monsters on exhibition. Several now are prominently paraded there. The first that meets the eye on going up is a Fat Woman, weighing upwards, say the bills, of seven hundred pounds. A flying flag has a portrait of this oleagenous Venus, who appears rocking in a sea of what the doctors call adipose deposit and the butchers, suet. Is it really such an agreeable sight to behold a woman full five times heavier than she ought to be, according to the measurements of the classic girdle? Is beauty, that thing of joy forever, so palling to the sight that we must resort to the contemplation of a pyramid of panting tallow—a mountain of perspiring grease—to find out how far the age of undiseased mankind may be perverted by aberrations from nature, and huge and melancholy monstrosity take its place? Why should the misfortune of that woman be paraded in public? Why should her colossal folds of obesity be brazenly thrust in view, and even exaggerated and caricatured in the doubly disgusting flag which invites spectators to her apartments? It is enough that she is physically enormous, without being made personally public.

So too, the exhibition of the sleeping man. Here is a poor wretch, who . . . has less vitality than an oyster, placed before the general gaze. He has been asleep five years, except that, about every two or four months, he revives for a few minutes. He is wofully emaciated. He is inhumanly ugly. He is more horrible than a death-bed—more elegaic than a corpse. He is a living libel on human existence—a fierce degradation of manhood—not living, not dying, not dead—a shocking denial of precedents, facts and possibilities—a thing that should be kept out of sight and notice, and yet he is pushed into the van of publicities, and all the world called in to behold the sorry, wretched dreg of humanity.

Then comes—proh pudor—A Bearded Lady! Antique goddess of beauty what a descent is here! Mother of the graces—inspirer of kisses—alma mater—a woman with a beard! . . .

Then next on exhibition comes an hideous little dwarf; the King of Lilliputians, so called, a pale and trembling little whiffet—a living abortion—an idiot old at twenty months—a caricature at once of age and babyhood—the crib and the coffin cheek by jowl. Why should the existence of this poor little wretch be made the object of vicious curiosity, and hungry speculation? . . .

Out upon these hideous spectacles of abnormal nature and abused ingenuity! Let the appeals to the eye and the understanding be pure and real, and the vitiated taste which would hurl abominable sights into the face of the world be corrected, and a sound sentiment take its place.



Madame Josephine Boisdechene Clofullia was famous in London and Paris as the "Bearded Lady of Geneva" before Barnum brought her to New York. Thomas Easterly photographed the twenty-two-year-old during her visit to St. Louis in 1853. Missouri Historical Society.

Selling and Seeing Curiosities

Barnum's Museum on the corner of Ann and Broadway was at the hub of New York commerce, and close to both fashionable shopping and the Bowery workshops and tenements. One of Barnum's ploys was brash, garish advertising, with a spectacular fountain and reflecting light on the roof to attract passers-by. One hundred and four, large, oval, color transparencies decorated the facade of the five-story building. In March 1853 banners and posters celebrated the latest attraction, the Swiss Bearded Lady. The museum's official guide book later described her as a "genteel and accomplished lady—yet possessing as fine and *heavy Beard and Whiskers* as ever graced the face of a man, a freak of nature which the science of man has never been able to account for."[9]

Barnum was an obvious subject for one of the short, witty essays of "Fanny Fern," Sara Payson Willis Parton, who commented on issues in vogue for her female magazine readers. The tour of the Swedish opera-singer Jenny Lind Barnum that had arranged in 1850 had made him the talk of the nation. The abolitionist lectures of the Grimké sisters to "promiscuous" audiences, the Seneca Falls convention of 1848, and criticism of marriage, unequal property laws, and restricting dress had made women's rights a key issue. Naturally, Fanny Fern made Madame Clofullia's femininity the topic of discussion.

Fanny Fern, *Fern Leaves From Fanny's Port-Folio. Second Series* (Auburn, N.Y.: Ofton and Mulligan, 1854), 373–76.

It is possible that every stranger may suppose, as I did, on first approaching Barnum's Museum, that the greater part of its curiosities are on the outside, and have some fears that its internal will not equal its external appearance. But, after crossing the threshold, he will soon discover his mistake. The first idea suggested will perhaps be that the view, from the windows, of the motley, moving throng in Broadway—the rattling, thundering carts, carriages and omnibuses—the confluence of the vehicular and human tides which, from so many quarters, come pouring past the museum—is, (to adopt the language of advertisements,) ''worth double the price of admission.''

The visitor's attention will unquestionably be next arrested by the ''Bearded Lady of Switzerland''—one of the most curious curiosities ever presented. A card, in pleasant juxtaposition to the ''lady,'' conveys the gratifying intelligence that, ''Visitors are allowed to touch the beard.'' Not a man in the throng lifts an investigating finger! Your penetration, Madame Clofullia, does you infinite credit. You knew well enough that your permission would be as good as a handcuff to every pair of masculine wrists in the company. For my own part, I should no more meddle with your beard, than with Mons. Clofullia's. I see no femininity in it. Its shoe-brush aspect puts me on my decorum. I am glad you raised it, however, just to show Barnum there is something ''new under the sun,'' and to convince men in general that a woman can accomplish about anything she undertakes.

I have not come to New York to stifle my inquisitiveness. How did you raise that beard? Who shaves first in the morning? you, or your husband? Do you use a Wom-

an's Rights razor? Which of you does the *strap*-ping? How does your baby know you from its father? What do you think of us, smooth-faced sisters? Do you (between you and me) prefer to patronize dress-makers, or tailors? Do you sing tenor, or alto? Are you master, or mistress of your husband's affections?

In the 1840s and 1850s Barnum's "living curiosities" were a favorite subject for humorists. As soon as *The Life of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself* appeared in 1855, a parody appeared, based probably on prepublication connivance with Barnum. "Petite Bunkum, Esquire, late merchant, and now a hunter after curiosities and wonders," burlesqued the showman's frank exposition of his methods. Like Fanny Fern's, faux-Barnum's comments on the bearded lady centered on gender roles, with a particular focus on woman as the main wage earner.

The Autobiography of Petite Bunkum, the Showman: Showing his Birth, Education, and Bringing Up; His Astonishing Adventures by Sea and Land; His Connection with Tom Thumb, Judy Heath, the Woolly Horse, the Fudge Mermaid, and the Swedish Nightingale . . . Written by Himself (New York: P. F. Harris, 1855), 49–51.

THE WHISKERED WOMAN

This remarkable lady I imported from France, although she is a native of Switzerland. Her husband and father accompanied her, and showed themselves in connection with her. She was also attended by a red-headed interpreter; and, being blessed with two children, it will be acknowledged that she had a very pretty little family to support by the display of her beard.

For three strapping men to live upon the earnings of a woman's whiskers, is a novelty not often seen at the present day.

The lady was indeed blessed with a luxuriant jet-black beard that excited the wonder, admiration, and envy of all the bloods about town. She freely allowed everyone who wished, to stroke her whiskers, so that the public might be convinced of their being genuine, and no sham. Her neck, shoulders, and as much of her back as she saw proper to display, were thickly sprinkled with hairs. Her bust was feminine, and remarkably full. Several certificates, which had been written and signed by physicians who were present at her accouchement, were hung up in the hall of exhibition. These were to convince the spectators that Madame was indeed a woman, and no man, as many foolish persons might have been inclined to suppose. One blockhead summoned both me and the Whiskered Woman before the Police Court, swearing that she was a man, and that I had swindled him out of a quarter! The matter was soon settled in my favor—in what manner, I do not choose to explain.

George Templeton Strong, a wealthy lawyer by profession but an aesthete and dilettante by inclination, thought Barnum's "an eyesore." The brass band

was raucous and irritating, the gaudy illustrations on the building's façade unattractive. Nevertheless, Strong always enjoyed the extensive natural history collections, and especially the menagerie. On March 2, 1860, he noted in his diary his reaction to Barnum's latest novelty. There had been "man-monkeys" before. In 1799 Charles Willson Peale had displayed a stuffed orangutan in his Philadelphia museum as the "Wild Man of the Woods," and asked his audience, "How like an old Negro?" Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) reopened the old controversy. Barnum's new exhibit was almost certainly "Zip," William Henry Johnson, clad in an ape-suit and with hair shaven to emphasize his cone-shaped head, and, like Peale's orangutan, holding a staff.

The "Man-Monkey," like the Swiss Bearded Lady, and many of the American Museum's prize exhibits defied conventional classification. The "nondescripts" seemed on the margins of two separate identities: the Fejee Mermaid, part woman, part fish; albino "White Negroes;" the "Leopard Child" with strangely pigmented black-and-tan skin; Miss Dora Dawson, dressed half as a woman and half as a man and singing both soprano and tenor; Jo-Jo, the "Dog-Faced Boy." For Strong, the intellectual puzzle justified close scrutiny of this curious, liminal figure.

The Diary of George Templeton Strong, 4 vols., ed. Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas (New York: Macmillan, 1952): March 2–3, 1860 [3:12–13]; June 6, 1860 [31]; September 3, 1863 [355]; November 27, 1863 [374]; July 13 1865 [4:17–18].

Stopped at Barnum's on my way downtown to see the much-advertised nondescript, the ''What-is-it.'' Some say it's an advanced chimpanzee, others that it's a cross between nigger and baboon. But it seems to me clearly an idiotic negro dwarf, raised, perhaps, in Alabama or Virginia. The showman's story of its capture (with three other specimens that died) by a party in pursuit of the gorilla on the western coast of Africa is probably bosh. The creature's look and action when playing with his keeper are those of a nigger boy. But the anatomical details are fearfully simian, and he's a great fact for Darwin.

Strong went back the next day for a closer look, and decided the "What-is-it?" was "palpably a little nigger and not a good-looking one." Some months later, on June 6, he visited Barnum's on his way home from the office.

That specimen of showmen has resumed his functions, and his ancient and seedy museum is instinct with new life. The old wax figures are propped and brushed up and some of the more conspicuously mangy of the stuffed monkeys and toucans have disappeared. There is a colossal fat boy on exhibition (a real prodigy of hideousness), in addition to the miraculous calculator and the ''What-is-it?'' I went to see the aquaria. Sundry splendid tropical things from the Gulf of Mexico have been introduced there.


BARNUM'S GALLERY OF WONDERS. No 26.
WHAT IS IT?_OR "MAN MONKEY".
ON EXHIBITION AT BARNUM'S MUSEUM, NEW YORK.
This is a most singular animal, with many of the features and other characteristics of both the HUMAN and BRUTE species. It was found in Africa, in a perfectly nude state, and with two others captured._The others died on their passage to this country. At first it ran on all fours, and was with difficulty learned to stand as nearly erect as here represented. It is the opinion of most scientific men that he is a connecting link between the WILD NATIVE AFRICAN, AND THE ORANG OUTANG.
He is playful as a Kitten and very apt pleasing interesting and amusing.
TO BE SEEN AT ALL HOURS.

Currier and Ives issued several lithographs of the "What Is It?" exhibit at Barnum's Museum. This one, from the early 1860s, emphasized the close association between the genteel family visitors and the "curiosity." Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont.

Sidney George Fisher retired early from business and devoted himself to scholarship and culture, and to his extensive social contacts among Philadelphia's elite. Like Strong, he did not share Barnum's populist view of the museum's function and admired only high-culture institutions. Nevertheless, on March 13, 1861, he attended Peale's former Philadelphia Museum, which Barnum had acquired in 1849 and "improved," and recorded his impressions. The "Aztec Children," Maximo and Bartola, reputed to be from an unknown race of gnomes from Yucatan, were favorite exhibits. In 1851 Nathaniel Parker Willis spent half an hour with the mentally retarded "little wonders" and held the hand of Bartola while Maximo sat on Willis's friend's lap. "With little intelligence, and skulls of such shape that no hope can be entertained of their being ever self-relying or responsible, they still inspire an indefinable feeling of interest" and affection, he concluded.[10] Fisher was more fastidious and reserved.

A Philadelphia Perspective: The Diary of Sidney George Fisher Covering the Years 1834–1871, ed. Nicholas B. Wainwright (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1967), 382.

> Went to see Barnum's exhibition of human curiosities, albinoes from Madagascar, a bushman from South Africa and two specimens, male and female, of what is said to be remnants of the Aztec race in Central America. The albinoes have white hair and pink eyes, but their faces are so intelligent and European that I doubt their being African. The bushman looks like a mulatto dwarf. She is about 4 feet 3 inches high, stout and 24 years old. The Aztecs were extraordinary creatures, heads very small, forehead and chin receding, idiotic expression, inarticulate cries, animated movements, brutified humanity, painful to look at. These, then, are lower states of what I am. Man in a state of arrested development.

For visitors to the museums, the great attraction of the human exhibits was their animated responses, even if only grunts and gestures. Part of the fascination was identifying—and even identifying with—these perplexing, bewildering, mysterious creations of God's universe. Barnum encouraged communication between viewer and viewed. Indeed, he disrupted the smooth, department-store order of scientific classification with "living curiosities" placed unexpectedly in dark corners among the display cases to startle the unwary. His giants and midgets were not like mute taxidermists' trophies seen from afar; they interacted with visitors in genteel surroundings, answered questions, sold pamphlets detailing their life histories, and, by the 1860s, signed photographic souvenirs of themselves.

Richard Grant White took the encounter between spectacle and spectator a step further. He imagined an English aristocrat's having to endure the niceties of polite conversation with one of the "curiosities" of a democratic,

egalitarian nation. Perhaps the pseudonym and the familiar format of an English traveler's tale allowed the Anglophile White greater freedom of expression to comment on national peculiarities and on the American Museum as the "representative institootion of this country." As a noted theater critic, he mixed in New York society and intellectual circles and had almost certainly met Barnum. If the fictional account is based on fact, the giantess might have been Sylvia Hardy from Maine, or more likely, Anna Swan from Pictou, Nova Scotia—White's Miss Condor (the largest bird in the American hemisphere) being a play on her surname—billed by Barnum as "an extraordinary specimen of magnified humanity." White elaborated the dialogue between patron and patronized into a scenario of embarrassing social equality and unwelcome intimacy.

[Richard Grant White,] *The Adventures of Sir Lyon Bouse, Bart. in America, During the Civil War* (New York: American News, 1867), 32, 33–38.

I visited Barnum's Museum myself, but did not remain there long. A giant and giantess were on exhibition, and . . . as I had heard that the giantess, who is said to be taller then the giant, was an American, in fact a ''Down-East'' Yankee, and as I doubted very much the ability of New England to produce anything gigantic, except brag and swindles, I was anxious to see her. But, when I inquired for her, I was told that she was not then to be seen, as she had retired for a short time to rest. Here was another swindle, to begin with. This man Barnum advertised his giantess to be seen; I paid my money, and, when I asked to see her, she was *not* to be seen. I began to say very plainly what I thought of such an imposition; but the people around me, to my surprise, although they gathered near and listened, did not back me, or show much sympathy.

Presently a portly, curly-haired man in black approached, and I heard some one say, ''There comes Mr. Barnum himself.'' He came up and asked what was the matter; adding, in the smoothest manner, that he hoped nothing had happened to dissatisfy the patrons of this establishment. I told him I wanted to see the giantess I had paid to see, and that she was not there. ''Well,'' he said, ''I'm sorry that she isn't here. But she's ben here all the morning; and we hev to be a little careful and easy with our giants. Giants ain't up to so much exhibition work, standin' round an' like, as people that isn't giants. An' so we spell 'em, particularly the lady giants. [What could he mean of spelling giants?] Our Belgian friend here'll have to go and take a rest pretty soon, and then the lady'll come out.'' The reader may be sure that I was not to be put off with any such chaff as this; and I told the man in pretty plain terms what I thought of his scoundrelly behavior, which, I added, was just what might be expected from a clock-making Yankee. To my surprise, he offered no apology, nor did he get angry but said to my very face, that, although he did not undertake to enforce good manners in his establishment, he always expected them, and from Yankees he always had them, whether they made clocks or not. Then, taking out a quarter of a dollar, he had the impudence to offer it to me, and to say, that, as I was dissatisfied, he would be

pleased if I would take my money and go. But I was determined not to be put off in this manner; and so I told him that I didn't want my money back, and wouldn't take it. I wanted to see the giantess, and that I should be satisfied with nothing less. He looked at me a moment with a queer expression in his eyes, which I remember having seen in the eyes of many of his countrymen afterward, and said, ''So you must see the giantess, must you?''—''Yes, of course I must.''—''Well, then,'' taking me aside a little, ''I think I shall hev to give you a private interview, if that'll suit.'' I was pleased to find that a little becoming self-assertion, and taking a decided stand, had produced a proper effect: a private exhibition was, of course, most acceptable to me.

Mr. Barnum disappeared for a few minutes, and, when he returned, he slipped his arm very coolly into mine, and he led me off to side room. As we entered, he asked me my name, and, on learning it, said, ''Oh! I know you very well, sir, by reputation, although I have never had the pleasure of meeting you before.'' This was also gratifying. . . . Mr. Barnum led me up to a sofa where the giantess was sitting. I saw a huge, moony face, above a pair of monstrous shoulders, and a mass of female drapery. The face was on a level with my own, although I was standing. ''Miss Condor,'' said Mr. B., with the formality of a master of ceremonies, ''allow me to introduce Sir Lyon Bouse, of England; Sir Lyon Bouse, Miss Condor.'' I was very much taken aback. To have a private view of a curiosity is one thing, and is an attention quite suitable to one's reasonable expectations; but to be introduced to a giantess!—that's quite another. But the giantess herself was not at all discomposed, either by the introduction or by my rank; and, when I bowed, said, in a voice just like a woman's, ''Good morning, sir; I'm very happy to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance.'' Mr. Barnum pointed to the sofa by the side of the monster in petticoats, and said: ''Do sit down, Sir Lyon;'' then, turning to her, ''Sir Lyon is a devoted admirer of the ladies.'' This was more than I had bargained for; but I took the seat, as the best thing to be done under the circumstances.

Miss Condor received Mr. Barnum's remark in regard to my tastes with an enormous simper, and, giantess although she was, turned upon me that indescribable look a woman wears when she is expecting a compliment. I did not know exactly how to pay her one, the circumstances were so very extraordinary, and, I may even say, so embarrassing. So I sat still, and she and Mr. Barnum looked at me, until it seemed as if I was the show, instead of the giantess. It was beginning to be somewhat oppressive, this interview; yet neither of the other parties seemed to find it so, but looked at me with the utmost serenity, and at each other with no less complaisance.

At last Mr. Barnum said, ''Miss Condor, will you be kind enough to rise? Sir Lyon is a great admirer of the human figure.'' All this formality with a giantess that I had expected to see stirred up like a she bear, considerately, of course, however! She rose in a dignified and almost solemn manner; and, as her face ascended, followed by her shoulders, and by her gradually unfolding drapery, I thought the process of her elongation would never be accomplished. When she stood I rose also, it would be hard for me to tell why[.] . . . Under the circumstances, I thought it would be well to pay Miss

Condor the compliment which it would appear that the singular customs of the country led giantesses to expect. But while I was thinking over my subject, and choosing my phrase, Mr. Barnum suddenly said, ''Well, Sir Lyon, I hev business that calls me away; but don't let that disturb you. You can remain with Miss Condor until she is ready to resoome her dooties;'' and then (I assure my readers that I am telling them the truth) ''perhaps you will give her your arm out.'' Saying this, he departed.

I must confess that, admitting Mr. Barnum's civility in giving me a private view of one of his curiosities, in the shape the affair was taking, it did not seem to me at all like the delicate attention on his part that I had been led to expect. Determining, however, to put the best face upon the matter, I began a pretty speech; although I must admit that the combination of vastness and serenity on my companion's countenance—now my only companion—was not favorable to the formation of the dainty and well-turned phrases with which one likes to placate a lady of imposing presence. I said, however, that ''I was delighted, in fact, quite charmed, to have the pleasure'':—I don't think I got further, or much further than that, when the lady sidled toward me with a movement so tremendous, and beamed upon me with a smile so expansive, that I must confess I was somewhat disconcerted, and could not continue my speech with quite all the coherence and dignity which it is agreeable for a man to manifest in presence of one of the other sex, whatever her condition in life. The consequence was, that I found myself looking up speechless at this monstrous young woman, who continued to sidle and simper in her gigantic fashion. Now, to any one who happens to read these pages, this may appear a very trifling matter; but that can only be the opinion of men who have never been placed in my position. To have a lady pleased with one's company and with what one says is certainly very gratifying, especially if the lady herself is an attractive person; but, even in the intercourse of life under ordinary circumstances, the blandishments which are so charming in some women are not at all alluring in others.

I could name many women at home, and have even seen some in this country, whose gracious reception of my advances would excite in me only the liveliest emotions of pleasure; but I must own that the prospect of becoming the object of Miss Condor's colossal coquetry produced in me the most disagreeable sensation of the kind I can remember. There I was, quite at her mercy, as one may say. I candidly confess that nothing could have been more proper than her conduct; but I could not reflect, that, if she were a designing giantess, my reputation, and even my purse, was in her power. The situation was even more perilous than that of travelling at home in a railway carriage with an unprotected female. What if she should offer to kiss me? I should, of course, refuse; but would she ravish the salute? I was but imperfectly acquainted with the customs here; and above all, I was ignorant of the manners of giantesses in this strange country. My thoughts began to come with more rapidity than coherence, and I decided that the best thing I could do was to retire. So, after assuring the lady that I was delighted to make her acquaintance, and bowing to her as politely as possible, I went quickly out of the room and of the Museum, determined never again to be left alone with such a large female of my own species.

Commentary

Gleason's was one of the large-format, illustrated popular magazines. Its praise for the American Museum in 1853 showed how successful had been Barnum's strategy of cultivating the middlebrow public. Jenny Lind and temperance drama in the Lecture Room helped his campaign. Fine-art transparencies of European cities, statues, and the innumerable cases of natural history framed the main attractions, the spectacles of the living performers, animal and human. By 1863 the museum claimed 833 separate attractions and 850,000 items in the seven "saloons" on the five floors.

"American Museum, New York," *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* 4 (January 29, 1853): 72, 73.

Located at the confluence of the two great thoroughfares of the city, it is an object of great attraction, from the flags, transparencies and paintings with which its exterior is decorated. On gala days, or other occasions of public interest, it bears off the palm by the number and beauty of its decorations; its location affording the finest possible opportunity for display. . . . We know that the name of Barnum and humbug are synonymous, but dropping the Fejee mermaid, Joyce Heth, and others of that elk, we cannot but give him the credit of offering the most pleasant and attractive place of amusement on this continent. Indeed, on a visit recently, we spent between three and four hours in viewing the attractions in two rooms only of this immense establishment, and left with the most pleasing impressions. . . . The ''Happy Family,'' too, with which Barnum's name has become inseparably connected, is another of the manifold curiosities of this wonder-awakening establishment. Here are seen animals of the most incongruous natures eating out of the same dish, resting upon the same perch, and making their beds together. Owls and doves, eagles and rabbits, cats and rats, hawks and small birds, monkeys, guinea-pigs, mice, squirrels, and a host of others, ''too numerous to mention,'' forming altogether one of the most incongruous collections ever put together. . . . [T]he Lecture Room . . . is one of the most elegant and recherche halls of its class to be found anywhere. It is fitted up in the most gorgeous style, yet so arranged as not to offend the eye with a multiplicity of ornament. All is harmonious, and there is nothing to detract from the general beauty of the whole. Of the performances in this room it is scarcely necessary for us to speak. The truth is, the public had long felt the want of a place of public entertainment in which a proper respect for the decencies and decorum of life were judiciously mingled with the broadest elements of mirth, and the refined vagaries of the most exuberant fancy. We have furnished in this lecture-room just such a place.—Every species of amusement, ''from grave to gay, from lively to severe,'' is furnished—but so judiciously purged of every semblance of immorality, that the most fastidious may listen with satisfaction, and the most sensitive witness without fear.

In some measure the same influence is exercised by the American Museum, in

New York, as is the case with the Boston Museum. Thousands, who from motives of delicacy, cannot bring themselves to attend theatrical representations in a *theatre*, find it easy enough to reconcile a *museum*, and its vaudevilles and plays to their consciences. We confess that it is very difficult for us to make a distinction between the two, when the same plays are performed, the same actors employed, and the same effect given. If well conducted, we can realize no harm from either; but, on the contrary, consider that agreeable and often instructive amusement is thus afforded to the million, at a cheap rate. There are many sound moral principles that cannot be so thoroughly impressed in any other way as by theatrical representations; the more *lifelike* the example, the more impressive the contrast between good and evil—and a good play always holds up vice to disgrace, and elevates virtue and the love of right. Many of the plays of modern times are as good practical sermons as were ever preached from the pulpit, and, beyond a doubt, exert quite as exalted and purifying an influence. The play of ''The Drunkard,'' as performed at the Boston Museum, not long since, doubtless exerted a strong and lasting influence in behalf of the cause of temperance, more potent than fifty lectures delivered before the same number of people upon this subject.

Barnum attracted much adverse comment when the local Republican convention nominated him as its candidate for Connecticut's Fourth Congressional District in 1867. The *Nation*, the influential reforming periodical edited by E. L. Godkin, commented that his skills of trickery epitomized the domination of market forces in the corrupt days of Reconstruction. The pretentious respectability with which he foisted fakes on the gullible public was a travesty of the true gentility expected of a representative. Nearly two years earlier, it had criticized the cultural pretensions of Barnum's "Congress of Wonders": the "heterogeneous heap" in such "so-called museums" merely "pandered to the most foolish curiosity and to the most morbid appetite for the marvellous." And more than a decade before, the *Christian Parlor Magazine* had protested that "latterly our museums have been transformed into petty theatres with the lowest order of farce, not to study the wonders of nature or the beauties of art."[11]

" 'The Two Hundred Thousand and First Curiosity' in Congress," *Nation* 4 (March 7, 1867): 191–92.

He is the personification—and, so far from concealing or denying it, boasts of it—of a certain low kind of humbug; humbug so petty, and producing so little apparent mischief, that people are rather disposed to be utilitarian in their way of judging it, and smile at it. It is a kind of humbug, too, into which the Yankee ''smartness,'' in its last and worst stages, appears to run naturally; but which, funny as it often appears, eats out the heart of religion and morality even more effectually than the display of great crimes or great vices, and which, if it were to spread, might easily end in presenting us

with a community regular in its praying and singing and decent in external crust, but in which all below was rottenness and uncleanness, in which the men were without truth and the women without virtue. He has passed his life in ransacking the world for curiosities to exhibit—or, in other words, as a ''showman.'' We do not concur in the low estimate in which a showman's calling is popularly held. If it be honorable or instructive to go to see strange or queer things, it is honorable to collect and exhibit them; and if Barnum had confined himself to this . . . we should not accuse him, as we now do, of having been for twenty or thirty years a depraving and demoralizing influence. His success in money-getting, so far from atoning for his offences, . . . only aggravates them; because it makes his example the more corrupting to the thousands of young men who leave home each year in New England with money-getting set before them as their mission in life. We laugh over the woolly horse, the mermaids, the Circassian girl, and the dozen other devices to which he every year resorts to extract quarters from the country people who visit New York; and there has been so much laughing about it, and he himself joins in the laughing so readily, that we forget that it is simply swindling on a small scale, and that the spirit which prompts it and sustains it is the very same spirit which fills the jails with forgers and embezzlers and ''sneak-thieves.'' What makes all it all the more revolting, too, is his own efforts to deceive himself and his victims into the belief that he makes his trade moral by keeping up an appearance of respectability in his museum, and excluding all ''indecent allusions or gestures,'' as he piously announces in his play-bills, from the stage of what, with all a humbug's deference for the prejudices of the religious world, he calls his ''lecture room.'' We say nothing here of the intense and concentrated vulgarity—we do not use the word as the antithesis of ''gentility''—of the atmosphere which surrounds him. . . . Nor would we dwell even on the knavishness of his career for the mere purpose of injuring his business, or trying to cure the depraved or debasing taste for monstrosities to which he so laboriously panders, knowing, as we do, how delighted he is with anything which increases his notoriety. . . . Anyone who wants a good illustration of Mr. Barnum's career and calling can hardly do better than to visit his ''lecture room,'' and witness the great ''moral drama'' of the ''Christian Martyrs,'' which is now presented there to ''delighted thousands.'' It is an affecting portrayal of Christian sufferings and constancy in the worst days of the pagan empire; the dresses are gorgeous, the pious rant is unexceptionable, and the scenery imposing; the martyrs are delivered in the arena to Van Amburgh's lions, brought up from the lower floor of the museum for their bloody work—and all for thirty cents a head. In the final tableau, Constantine's cross appears in the sky, and the Roman empire is converted amidst bursts of applause, whereupon the curtain falls and is seen to be covered thickly with puffs of ''Horse Linament,'' ''Yahoo Bitters,'' ''Ready Reliefs'' and ''Pain Extractors,'' and other quack medicines.

Barnum was so angered by the *Nation*'s attack on his reputation that he wrote a letter to the editor. He admitted the American Museum was less

scientific and less academically respectable than the great institutions of Europe. He proposed a free national museum in New York, perhaps in Central Park, funded by Congress, which might display surplus treasures from the Smithsonian Institution and government departments, and banish the calumny that profit-making destroyed art and culture. The old American Museum might have given too little enlightenment, but it was never, he protested, guilty of promoting debased standards of morality.

"Mr. Barnum on Museums," *Nation* 4 (August 10, 1867): 171.

I am not so thin skinned, and I know my Museum was not so refined or classic or scientifically arranged as the foreign government institutions, for mine had to support my family, while those require annually from the government thousands of pounds. "That class for which it would seem to have been originally intended" would *not support* a proper museum pecunarily. More's the pity—but such is the stern fact. Hence, to make it self-supporting, I was obliged to popularize it, and while I still held on to the "million of curiosities," millions of persons were only induced to see them because, at the same time, they could see whales, giants, dwarfs, Albinoes, dog shows, et cetera. But it is a great error to state that I ever permitted "vulgar sensation dramas." No vulgar word or gesture, and not a profane expression, was ever allowed on my stage! Even in Shakespeare's plays, I unflinchingly and invariably cut out vulgarity and profanity. It is equally incorrect that "respectable citizens did not take their wives and daughters" "to see a play on that stage." Your writer doubtless supposed he was stating facts, but let him enquire, and he will find that nothing could be further from the truth. I am sensitive on these points, because I was always extremely squeamish in my determination to allow nothing objectionable on my stage.

I permitted no intoxicating liquors in the Museum. I would not even allow my visitors to "go out to drink" and return again without paying a second time, and this reconciled them to the "ice-water" which was always profuse and free on each floor of the Museum. I could not personally or by proxy examine into the character of every visitor, but I continually had half a score of detectives dressed in plain clothes, who incontinently turned into the street every person of either sex whose actions indicated loose habits. My interest even depended upon my keeping a good reputation for my Museum, and I did it to a greater degree than one out of ten could attain who had charge of a free museum, or even a free picture gallery. Now, I beg of you to submit the above to the writer of the article in question, and ask him, as an act of justice, to set me right before the public. Humbug with me has had its day, and, although I always gave the money's worth of that which was not demoralizing, I often grieved that the taste of the million was not elevated.

Dog Days of the Museum

"The Happy Family" menagerie, one of its best-loved attractions, exemplified this appeal. Within the one large cage, predator and prey coexisted harmoniously, "contentedly playing and frolicking together, without injury or discord."[12] Puzzled visitors marveled that human agency could create the peaceable kingdom foretold in the Bible where natural enemies might lie side by side. Mark Twain was less than impressed by the condition of Barnum's Museum in 1867. The old museum had burned to the ground in July 1865 and Barnum had opened a new premises with an entirely new collection farther up Broadway, between Spring and Prince Streets. But it was smaller, dingy, and for all Barnum's resilence and waning enthusiasm, less interesting.

Mark Twain's Travels with Mr. Brown, being heretofore uncollected sketches written by Mark Twain for the San Francisco Alta California in 1866 & 1867, describing the adventures of the author and his irrepressible companion in Nicaragua, Hannibal, New York, and other spots on their way to Europe, ed. Franklin Walker and G. Ezra Dane (New York: Knopf, 1940), 116–19.

. . . I went to his museum yesterday, along with the other children. There is little or nothing in the place worth seeing, and yet how it draws! It was crammed with both sexes and all ages. One could keep on going up stairs from floor to floor, and still find scarcely room to turn. There are numerous trifling attractions there, but if there was one grand, absorbing feature I failed to find it. There is a prodigious woman, eight feet high, and well proportioned, but there was no one to stir her up and make her show her points, so she sat down all the time. And there is a giant, also, just her size; but he appears to be sick with love for her, and so he sat morosely on his platform, in his astonishing military uniform, and wrought no wonders. If I was impressario of that menagerie, I would make that couple prance around some, or I would dock their rations. Two dwarfs, unknown to fame, and a speckled negro, complete the list of human curiosities. They profess to have a Circassian girl there, but I could not find her. I think they moved her out, to make way for another peanut stand. In fact, Barnum's Museum is one vast peanut stand now, with a few cases of dried frogs and other wonders scattered here and there, to give variety to the thing. You can't go anywhere without finding a peanut stand, and an impudent negro sweeping up hulls. When peanuts and candy are slow, they sell newspapers and photographs of the dwarfs and giants.

There are some cages of ferocious lions, and other wild beasts, but they sleep all the time. And also an automaton card writer; but something about it is broken, and it don't go now. Also a good many bugs, with pins stuck through them; but the people do not seem to enjoy bugs any more. There is a photograph gallery in one room and an oyster saloon in another, and some news depots and soda fountains, a pistol gallery, and a raffling department for cheap jewelry, but not any barber shop. A plaster of Paris statue of Venus, with little stacks of dust on her nose and her eyebrows, stands

neglected in a corner, and in some large glass cases are some atrocious waxen images, done in the very worst style of the art. Queen Victoria is dressed in faded red velvet and glass jewelry, and has a bloated countenance and a drunken leer in her eye, that remind one of convivial Mary Holt, when she used to come in from a spree to get her ticket for the County Jail. And that cursed eye-sore to me, Tom Thumb's wedding party, which airs its smirking imbecility in every photograph album in America, is not only set forth here in ghastly wax, but repeated! Why does not some philanthropist burn the Museum again?

The Happy Family remains, but robbed of its ancient glory. A poor, spiritless old bear—sixteen monkeys—half a dozen sorrowful raccoons—two mangy puppies—two unhappy rabbits—and two meek Tom cats, that have had half the hair snatched out of them by the monkeys, compose the Happy Family—and certainly it was the most subjugated-looking party I ever saw. The entire Happy Family is bossed and bullied by a monkey that any one of the victims could whip, only that they lack the courage to try it. He grabs a Tom cat by the nape of the neck and bounces him on the ground, he cuffs the rabbits and the coons, and snatches his own tribe from end to end of the cage by the tail. When the dinner-tub is brought in, he gets boldly into it, and the other members of the family sit patiently around till his hunger is satisfied or steal a morsel and get bored heels over head for it. The world is full of families as happy as that. The boss monkey has even proceeded so far as to nip the tail short off one of his brethren, and now half the pleasures of the poor devil's life are denied him, because he hain't got anything to hang by. It almost moves one to tears to see that bob-tailed monkey work his stump and try to grab a beam with it that is a yard away. And when his stump naturally misses fire and he falls, none but the heartless can laugh. Why cannot he become a philosopher? Why cannot he console himself with the reflection that tails are but a delusion and a vanity at best.

Barnum puts a play on his stage called the ''Christian Martyr,'' and in the third act all the mules and the lions, and sheep, and tigers, and pet bulls, and other ferocious wild animals, are marched about the stage in grand procession preparatory to going through the Christian. In the final act they throw the Christian into a cage with a couple of lions, but they were asleep, and all the punching the Martyr could do, and all the cursing he could get off under his breath failed to wake them; but the ignorant Roman populace on the stage took their indifference for Providential interference, and so they let the doomed Christian slide. Barnum's lions prefer fresh beef to martyrs. I suspect they are of the same breed as those we read of that were too stuck up to eat good old Daniel.

A generation later, William Dean Howells, noted novelist and dramatist, turned his journalist's eye on the dime museum. He had criticized the legitimate theatre for being too elitist, with high prices and unrealistic plots. Through the words of a fictitious "friend," Howells commented on popular taste and on the varied entertainments of a cheap but respectable Bowery museum that lacked Barnum's resources.

Dog Days of the Museum

William Dean Howells, "At a Dime Museum," in *Literature and Life: Studies* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1902), 194–98.

I don't contend that it is intellectual, but I say that it is often clever and charming at the ten-cent shows. . . . I think the average of propriety is rather higher than it is at the two-dollar theatres; and it is much more instructive at the ten-cent shows, if you come to that. The other day . . . I went to a dime museum for an hour that I had between two appointments, and I must say that I never passed an hour's time more agreeably. In the curio hall, as one of the lecturers on the curios called it, they had several lecturers in white wigs and scholars' caps and gowns—there was not a great deal to see, I confess; but everything was very high-class. There was the inventor of a perpetual motion, who lectured upon it and explained it from a diagram. There was a fortune-teller in a three-foot tent whom I did not interview; there were five macaws in one cage, and two gloomy apes in another. On a platform at the end of the hall was an Australian [aborigine] family a good deal gloomier than the apes, who sat in the costume of our latitude, staring down the room with varying expressions all verging upon melancholy madness, and gave me such a pang of compassion as I have seldom got from the tragedy of the two-dollar theatres. They allowed me to come quite close up to them, and to feed my pity upon their wild dejection in exile without stint. I couldn't enter into conversation with them, and express my regret at finding them so far from their native boomerangs and kangaroos and pine-tree grubs, but I know they felt my sympathy, it was so evident. I didn't see their performance, and I don't know that they had any. They may simply have been there ethnologically, but this was a good object, and the sight of their spiritual misery was alone worth the price of admission.

After the inventor of the perpetual motion had brought his harangue to a close, we all went round to the dais where a lady in blue spectacles lectured us upon a fire-escape which she had invented, and operated a small model of it. None of the events were so exciting that we could regret it when the chief lecturer announced that this was the end of the entertainment in the curio hall, and that now the performance in the theatre was about to begin. He invited us to buy tickets at an additional charge of five, ten, or fifteen cents for the gallery, orchestra circle, or orchestra.

I thought I could afford an orchestra stall, for once. We were three in the orchestra, another man and a young mother, not counting the little boy she had with her; there were two people in the gallery, and a dozen at least in the orchestra circle. An attendant shouted, "Hats off!" and the other man and I uncovered, and a lady came up from under the stage and began to play the piano in front of it. The curtain rose, and the entertainment began at once. It was a passage apparently from real life, and it involved a dissatisfied boarder and the daughter of the landlady. There was not much coherence in it, but there was a good deal of conscience on the part of the actors, who toiled through it with unflagging energy. The young woman was equipped for the dance she brought into it at one point rather than for the part she had to sustain in the drama. It was a very blameless dance, and she gave it as if she was tired of it, but was

not going to falter. She delivered her lines with a hard, Southwestern accent, and I liked fancying her having come up in a simpler-hearted section of the country than ours, encouraged by a strong local belief that she was destined to do Juliet and Lady Macbeth, or Peg Woffington at the least; but very likely she had not.

Her performance was followed by an event involving a single character. The actor, naturally, was blackened as to his skin, and at first glance I could see that he had temperament. I suspect that he thought I had, too, for he began to address his entire drama to me. This was not surprising, for it would not have been the thing to single out the young mother; and the other man in the orchestra stalls seemed a vague and inexperienced youth, whom he would hardly have given the preference over me. I felt the compliment, but upon the whole it embarrassed me; it was too intimate, and it gave me a publicity I would willingly have foregone. I did what I could to reject it, by feigning an indifference to his jokes; I even frowned a measure of disapproval; but this merely stimulated his ambition. He was really a merry creature, and when he had got off a number of very good things which were received in perfect silence, and looked over his audience with a woebegone eye, and said, with an effect of delicate apology, ''I hope I'm not disturbing you any,'' I broke down and laughed, and that delivered me into his hand. He immediately said to me that now he would tell me about a friend of his, who had a pretty large family, eight of them living, in Philadelphia; and then for no reason he seemed to change his mind, and said he would sing me a song written expressly for him—by an express-man; and he went on from one wild gayety to another, until he had worked his audience up to quite a frenzy of enthusiasm, and almost had a recall when he went off.

I was rather glad to be rid of him, and I was glad that the next performers, who were a lady and a gentleman contortionist of Spanish-American extraction, behaved more impartially. They were really remarkable artists in their way, and though it's a painful way, I couldn't help admiring their gift in bow-knots and other difficult poses. The gentleman got abundant applause, but the lady at first got none. I think perhaps it was because, with the correct feeling that prevailed among us, we could not see a lady contort herself with so much approval as a gentleman, and there was a wound to our sense of propriety in witnessing her skill. But I could see that the poor girl was hurt in her artist pride by our severity, and at the next thing she did I led off the applause with my umbrella. She instantly lighted up with a joyful smile, and the young mother in the orchestra leaned forward to nod her sympathy to me when she clapped. We were fast becoming a domestic circle, and it was very pleasant, but I thought that upon the whole I had better go. . . .

It was all very pathetic, in a way. Three out of those five people were really clever, and certainly artists. That colored brother was almost a genius, a very common variety of genius, but still a genius, with a gift for his calling that couldn't be disputed. He was a genuine humorist, and I sorrowed over him—after I got safely away from his intimacy—as I should over some author who was struggling along without winning his public.

Dog Days of the Museum

The journalist Rollin Lynde Hartt visited a small city dime museum early in the twentieth century. The old-style shows lacked the glamor of the better-financed vaudeville theatres, and even the "dim, flickering, bespeckled" films Hartt saw there were now offered at the local nickelodeons. This "temple of inanity," he decided, was unpretentious—"art plays second-fiddle to freaks"—and gave the human detritus of the city who were unable or unwilling to think, precisely what they wanted: "a vast and beneficent foolishness."

Rollin Lynde Hartt, *The People at Play* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1909), 87–88, 89–90, 92, 110–12.

The lowly, argue those who know not, repair thither to gloat over the affliction of their over-sized, under-sized, and otherwise peculiar fellow mortals. Then how comes it that they scan the exhibits with awe-struck reverence? that they keep a straight face while the lecturer heaps grandiloquent adulation upon his freaks? that every curio esteems himself a special pet of Providence, as who should say, ''Behold the marvels that God hath wrought in my person!'' . . .

Who are we that we should scoff when the ignorant—those who now stand marveling before the pictures and presently slouch toward the ticket-window—worship the rare accidents and misdemeanors of variation, forgetting that by virtue of their consistent normality it is they themselves who will constitute the only really marvelous exhibits in Curio Hall?

I counsel you to follow them in. They represent the substratum of society. Upon their foolishness rests the perpetuity of our institutions. . . .

Whereas you treasure monstrosities in marble, in bronze, and in deckle-edged editions, the humble do but treasure the only monstrosities that fall within their ken. . . . You press forward, and come to a tall room with square posts to prop its ceiling, walls freely kalsomined [color-washed] in red and yellow, and along the walls the cages, booths, thrones, and stages of greatness. This is Curio Hall. No seats; everybody is standing, gazing open-mouthed upon a freak, and listening with rapt deference while the ''professor'' declaims his ''lecture.'' You get an impression of weather-worn Derby hats, with here and there a tawdry bonnet, . . . showing them to be inferior, in stature, in development, in endurance, and in comeliness, to the well-to-do. . . .

But it is the social philosopher, methinks, who should be most grateful to Curio Hall. Its existence spells safety for the existing social order. Think you it is the progress of enlightenment that sanctions and perpetuates our scheme of human relationships? Far otherwise. Rather is it the survival of benightedness. So long as endures the gallery of ''exclusive living oddities,'' with pitiful blockheads to gape at them, so long will there abound those scullions, scavengers, stokers, flunkies, and wretched wage-minions upon whose docility we depend for our maintenance. Given intelligence to perceive the joke implied in their adoration of abnormalities, they might detect the huge, historic, practical joke played upon them by destiny.

MINSTRELSY

Londoners at the Adelphi Theatre in June and July 1843 were entertained by another American novelty. The city had already seen Barnum's Tom Thumb and George Catlin's Indian Gallery. Now the *Times* drew attention to the new "Ethiopian concert, by four Virginian minstrels, in which some of the original airs of the interior of Africa, modernized if not humanized in the slave states of the Union, and adapted to ears polite, have been introduced by the musical conductor of the theatre." This "negro concert" featured a band in blackface make-up playing banjo, violin, "bone castanetts," and tambourine, with impersonations of black speech and dance. Only five months before, the performers—Dan Emmett, Frank Brower, Billy Whitlock and Dick Pelham—had introduced to New York what became known as the minstrel show in its classic form.[1]

Minstrelsy developed further the long tradition in the English theater of characterizations of "Negroes," usually not depicted with the aid of black make-up. In the late eighteenth century, sentimental songs and speeches had depicted the sufferings of Africans far from home. More common were portrayals of comic servants in the West Indies who spoke a strange Africanized English and had wild, uncontrolled movements. In 1824 the actor Charles Mathews created a sensation in London with his caricatures of Agamemnon, the fat runaway slave fiddler, and his parody of the pretentious black Hamlet in the "Niggers Theatre," both based, he claimed, on close observation of the originals during the eighteen months he spent in America.

Significant as these rather mannered characterizations were, the main impulse behind minstrelsy was American and popular. Early blackface entertainers drew on sources of protest both traditional and modern. Anglo-Americans had long used masquerade, in which morris dancers and mummers adopted blackface disguise, and in carnival mood and loud noise had protested against social forces and figures undermining community solidarity. In the late 1820s and 1830s the main support for blackface comic acts in the theater came from urban manual laborers. W. T. Lhamon Jr. has argued that the carters, sailors, riggers, and longshoresmen who lived and worked along

the wharves of canals and seaports had a class loyalty, a "mudsill mutuality," which transcended many, but not all, of the barriers of race and ethnicity. They were accustomed to ethnic mingling and made black style and gesture their vehicle for expressing dissent. When relations between apprentices and masters became more distant and city sweatshops more common, the rough and raucous humor of blackface conveyed this heightened sense of class conflict.[2] One of the first entertainers to modify the English genteel model of blackface entertainment was George Washington Dixon. Dixon, who called himself "a buffo singer and comedian," was born of poor parents in Richmond and traveled with circuses along the Atlantic seaboard. In 1827 or 1828 he first performed "Coal Black Rose," a "buffo" (burlesque) of the conventional courtship song. Dixon's appearances at New York's Bowery and Chatham Theatres in 1829 brought him in contact with the rowdy, boisterous, working-class audiences of the Five Points district. It was no coincidence that this was the crucible of minstrelsy. Living close to the docks and warehouses near Catherine Market were New York's poorest. Those who lacked artisan skills struggled for a living in the new metropolis and resented the new code of gentility and reform. Here, too, was easy access to black folk style. Almost a tenth of New York's population was black. They were not segregated in large ghettoes, as they would be later in the century, but clustered in small "tenderloins" or "little Africas" throughout the city. In an age when one-fifth of all American sailors was black, the nation's busiest seaport was also host to many sailors. That presence was all the more striking in the 1820s before large-scale Irish and German immigration.

The most inventive and original early minstrel performer was Thomas Dartmouth Rice. Rice was born in the Bowery's Catherine Street, apprenticed as a ship's carver, and then became an itinerant actor and circus comic in the river towns of the Ohio Valley and the Upper South. Probably in 1830 he first performed "Jim Crow," the song which made his fortune. In 1832 he appeared in the major Mid-Atlantic cities and toured throughout the northeast for the next four years before his triumphant success in London. Rice's act was the product of a medley of influences. His songs had some of the irreverent humor of the Crockett Almanacs, but his ridicule of gentility was less impolite, less scurrilous. "Coal Black Rose" always remained part of his repertoire, so it is clear that Dixon was one model. More influential were the streets of the Bowery. Growing up one block away from Catherine Market, Rice had seen blacks "dancing for eels." The dancer raised his hands over his head, wheeled about, and jumped vigorously to the percussive beat of a drum and clapping. This was the model for the ragged Jim Crow and his erratic, anarchic jig.

Race mattered in the 1830s. New York state had finally ended the long

process of gradual emancipation in 1827, but "amalgamation" remained an emotive issue. Dixon's parody of "Zip Coon," the overdressed and ambitious black dandy, owed much to comic prints like the unflattering illustrations of Edward Clay and David Claypoole Johnson. The male audiences in the Bowery and Chatham Theatres who responded so enthusiastically to Dixon and Rice were familiar with the complex cultural references involving blackface. They applauded when the lowly clown mocked the powerful and pretentious, and enjoyed the robust, uninhibited humor, the exuberant, expressive physicality, and the new songs with lyrics of contemporary relevance set to familiar Irish melodies and interpreted with mimic-black body language.

Much of this noisy, carnival spirit was tamed in the 1840s, as more women attended. The first two minstrel troupes of 1842–43—Emmett's Virginia Minstrels and Christy's Virginia Minstrels in Buffalo—set a precedent for larger bands of four or six entertainers. The program gradually became more standardized, with acts more closely themed and coordinated. By the 1850s, the largest troupes, like the Christy Minstrels, structured the show loosely into three parts. The first element introduced the whole company in music and comedy and closed with a rousing song from all. What distinguished the variety of acts was the interchange between the flamboyant bones and tambourine players seated at the ends of a semicircle who mocked the dignified interlocutor acting as master of ceremonies. After the intermission, the olio, the second part, featured the specialized variety routines of individuals in short, virtuoso turns, impersonating "wenches," performing dances, delivering stump speeches, or pleasing the crowd with the sentimental songs of Stephen Foster. The concluding section was the most coherently organized with some semblance of a plot. The one-act farce, sometimes a parody of serious drama, more often a sketch set in plantation or city, blended music and dance with slapstick comedy, and a "walkaround" finale by the entire troupe. Charley White specialized in arranging and adapting these "Darkey Plays."

The essence of minstrelsy was burlesque. Audiences delighted in parodies of European high culture. The southern "common nigga" joined the western backwoodsman and the northern Yankee in a panoply of regional American folk heroes who ridiculed pretention. There were burlesque speeches, burlesque operas, burlesque ballets. The humorous lecture at a militia muster or the church sermon, given in broad dialect and with nonsensical words, mocked the learned orations and mastery of language so admired by the genteel. The "Ethiopian *Pas de Deux*" showed the grotesque antics of a cross-dressed "nigger wench." And, most prominently, there were comic versions of the latest European successes. Opera had wide appeal. Traveling opera companies brought the ballads of Bellini, Balfe, and Verdi to the larger towns of the northeast. Blackface musicians soon transformed familiar scenes and

songs: Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* became *Lucy-do-lam-her-more* or *Lucy-Did-Sham-Amour*. Minstrels who elevated the simple protagonists of Charley White's burlesque operas to equality with the Italian pantheon, William J. Mahar argues, "inverted that social order" of upper-class exclusiveness in opera houses "by exalting the American vernacular both in language and music" and asserting the common man's culture.[3]

Genteel magazines generally welcomed minstrelsy in its early years. It was vibrant and vigorous, if rather coarse and unrefined. A little reluctantly, Henry James the elder admitted a "fondness" for the "negro" song "that goes directly to the heart, and makes Italian trills seem tame." Some cultural nationalists saw in it those signs of originality which proved the blessings of republican liberty extended, if not to all the fine arts, then at least to the people's music. The *Knickerbocker* rejoiced that the "American national opera" was derived from the songs of slaves, the group "most secluded from foreign influences," and had "electrified the world." Praise from Charles Dickens seemed confirmation of coming glory.[4]

By the 1850s minstrelsy had lost much of its critical, questioning spirit and its distinctive identity. Few followed Margaret Fuller or Walt Whitman in heralding it as a praiseworthy achievement of the democratic culture; it was vulgar, if not debased. After the Civil War, blackface troupes boasted of their large companies, with Leavitt's Gigantean Ministrels challenging Cleveland's Colossals. Burlesque of polite culture remained central, but as mainstream entertainment blackface offered little more than a themed version of the general variety show. Often, after the war, even the plantation was missing from the program of miscellaneous sentimental songs, skits about women's rights, readings from Shakespeare, and longer sketches of life among the lowly. By the 1870s genuine blacks in blackface were a significant force in minstrelsy, and by the 1890s they had begun to dominate virtuoso dancing. Even in decline, for two generations after the Civil War burnt cork performers remained speciality acts in vaudeville, beyond Al Jolson's famous roles, with the young Judy Garland one of the last stars to don blackface.

Minstrel depictions of "Negro eccentricities" were much more than an expression of fellow feeling with black partners in a class crusade against middle-class convention. If there was admiration, jealousy, and envy for the actions of the black fools, there was also an unmistakable tone of racial denigration. As Eric Lott has shown, there was an undercurrent of sexual longing in the content and imagery of blackface performances. Blackface was a convenient disguise for cathartic release of repressed emotions and views on taboo subjects. Derogatory comments about "niggers" were common even among the educated, and there was generally little sensitivity to appropriate language in references to race and ethnicity. The humorist Mortimer Thomson described all "darkies" as having "foot of suitable dimensions for a railroad bridge,



Dan Bryant, pictured in blackface make-up, "fright" wig, and tambourine led one of the most successful New York minstrel troupes of the 1850s and 1860s. © Bettmann/CORBIS.

and mouth big enough for the depot." If minstrelsy appropriated black culture, and both rejoiced in it and maligned it, under the simple mask of "Ethiopian delineation," it also lampooned many elite and European cultural forms. It was complex and ambiguous—"collage entertainment where moods and meanings tumbled after one another with incredible quickness," manifesting both "respect and fear, affection and hate, need and scorn, caring and exploitation."[5]

Routines: Songs, Speeches, Dialogue, and Farce

Billy Whitlock, one of the original Virginia Minstrels, composed the most popular minstrel song of the 1840s. Its combination of sentimentality, comic nonsense, and a simple, repetitive tune made it a success with amateur and professional performers. It was topical, with mention of the Cachucha, a fast-paced Spanish dance popularized by the European ballerina Fanny Ellsler during her American tour of 1840–42. The role of Miss Lucy may have been the first for a cross-dressed "wench." The song celebrates male freedom; rebuffed in marriage, the would-be husband boasts of casting her off if she proves difficult.

S. Damon Foster, *Series of Old American Songs* (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Library, 1936).

Miss Lucy Long (1842)

I've come to see you again,
I'll sing another song,
Jist listen to my story,
It isn't very long.

Chorus: Oh, take your time Miss Lucy,
Take your time Miss Lucy Long,
Oh, take your time Miss Lucy,
Take your time Miss Lucy Long.

Miss Lucy, she is handsome,
And Miss Lucy, she is tall;
To see her dance Cachucha,
Is death to niggers all.

Oh! Miss Lucy's teeth is grinning,
Just like an ear ob corn,
And her eyes dey look so winning,
Oh! I would I'd ne'er been born.

I axed her for to marry
Myself de toder day,
She said she'd rather tarry,
So I let her hab her way.

If she makes a scolding wife,
As sure as she was born,

I'll tote her down to Georgia,
And trade her off for corn.

My Mamma's got de tisic,
And my daddy's got de gout:
Good morning, Mister Physick!
Does your mother know you're out.

Dan Emmett claimed to have written "Dandy Jim." Like the "Long-Tail'd Blue," made famous by George Washington Dixon, it was another song satirizing the gaudy male peacock and charlatan, the confidence-man. It proved more enduringly popular in minstrel programs than "Zip Coon" (1833), perhaps because Zip the "larned scholar" commented extensively, but narrowly, on Jacksonian politics. "Dandy Jim" had broad reference beyond the slave South to the city streets where boastful "swells," like Mose, the "Bowery B'hoy," with his greased ringlocks and flashy red shirt, promenaded and displayed themselves. There are least ten different versions of "Dandy Jim."

S. Damon Foster, *Series of Old American Songs* (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Library, 1936).

Dandy Jim from Caroline (1843)

I've often heard it said ob late,
Dat Souf Carolina was de state,
Whar a handsome nigga's bound to shine,
Like Dandy Jim from Caroline.

Chorus: For my ole missus tole me so,
I was de best looking nigga in de country, O,
I look in de glass and found 'twas so,
Just what massa tole me, O.

I drest myself from top to toe,
And down to Dinah I did go,
Wid pentaloons strapped down behind,
Like Dandy Jim from Caroline.

De bull dog cleared me out ob de yard,
I tought I'd better leabe my card,
I tied it fast to a piece ob twine,
Signed ''Dandy Jim from Caroline.''

She got my card and wrote me a letter,
And ebery word she spelt de better,

For ebery word an ebery line,
Was Dandy Jim from Caroline.

Oh, beauty is but skin deep,
But wid Miss Dinah none compete,
She changed her name from lubly Dine,
To Mrs. Dandy Jim from Caroline.

And ebery little nig she had,
Was the berry image ob de dad,
Dar heels stick out three feet behind,
Like Dandy Jim from Caroline.

I took dem all to church one day,
An hab dem christened widout delay,
De preacher christened eight or nine,
Young Dandy Jims from Caroline.

When Emerson and other prominent ministers and moralists became popular lecturers on the lyceum circuit, minstrels mocked the wise. Emotional sermons and pompous Fourth of July orations were favorite subjects for burlesque, with inappropriate nonsense words ridiculing pretentious sentiments. Any newsworthy subject, from the revolutions of 1848 to Manifest Destiny to the California Gold Rush, became suitable material.

De Negro's Original Piano-Rama, of Southern, Northern and Western Songs, to airs of all quarters, embracing de operatic de serenade and de soul combustion ballad, all sighentifically surplayed by three colored muses ob de plantation, de parlour an de kitchen (Philadelphia: Fisher and Brother, 1850), 67–69.

Grand Original, Local, Locomotive, Dog-matical, Grog-matical, Gold Fever-ical, An Prophetical LECTURE! For De Twenty-One Million

"Ah can ye not discover, by de signs ob de times."

Brodern an Sistern, Fellow Citizens, and animal exotics, an native indigeniouses:

De rounaboutationary resolution ob dis yar sub-lunar caustic globe, am fast comproximatin toward de WHOLE HALF ob de nineteenth century, an as it turns, 'cordin to de laws ob Sir Humphrey Gravy, a little bit more faster on its axes, its rebolution am symphietic, an de people feelin de strong percussion, am forcibly chucked into a state ob rebolution-eye-zation, an pitched clar up against de big wall of monarchy, custock-crazy, hygo-crazy, and all de oder-crazys, till dey get demo-crazy demselves.

Darfore, hence aroses de great parpetual comotion an spawn-taneous combus-

tion in de pole-cat-a-call, physicall at-most-fear, an de airth, like a great aeolian appa-rat-us, has warmed up her eggs, an hatched forth

''New signs ob de times.''

Dar in France, she hatched out some republican game chickens, an de king-cock had to cut without a comb to his head, an take a roost on de horns ob de British Bull; some said a cow, bekase it looked cow-ardly, but while de French quarrelled how to feed de publican chickens, a sly hawk walked in an picked 'em so bare dat all we can see am de bony-part. De Dutch king cock got shook from his roost, but he squeezed enough ob royal sour-crout out ob de nation's cellar to crawl back agin, an now he picks at de rebel chickens, wrings de necks ob de game rooster, an he Kuss-eth dar heads for rebel tators.

But my bruddern an feller sisterns, let him look out for de ''Signs ob de times,'' an beware ob de terrible tater peelin to come, for de 19th century can no more, an will no more warm up royal roosten eggs, dan a tumbler bug can hatch eagles.

Now, we'll succeed to de Delighted States ob de Americum Unicorn, whose territory extends from de extreme point ob day break, to de todder side ob sun navigation, an it is bounded by de roley boley-alls on de Norf, de ant-ark-tick pole on de Souf, de risin sun on de East, an on de West de day ob judgment. It possesses Noah's flood, divides into lakes an rivers, de entire garden ob Eden, wid all de creepen' an flyin' critters; de whole ob de milky way for nourishment, an de whole ob de tunder an lightin an shootin stars for a standin' army. De rainbow for a coat ob arms, de planets for a library, an de entire part ob immensity for mine diggins. Now den, let us look at her signs ob de times. Dar dey am, written in red hot letters ob Calaforny gold, to wit:

''Go ahead, in all things, wid a season ticket, all de way, clar through to Eternity.''

Dar's de boys, dat go ahead so fast in larnin dat instruction gits out ob water, an lights up a piece ob nothin to keep de grintellects in fuel, an de women know so much dat dey have to go wid dar arms an necks bare to let off de surplus rebenue ob knowledge, an thar obliged to nail de scalp ober de skull wid silver combs to keep de high pressure ob knowledge, from mount vesuviation, an dar so far advanced in modesty, dat dey won't receive a fortune dat's left 'em, 'kase it's a leg-i-see.

An, dar so religious dat dey eat pies at tea, so dat dey may hab pie-ous deams. An as for de men, dey go into reform by machinery, an some ob de reformers can shove any part ob de sinful world into dar lecture mill, and it comes out millenium. Some am so perfect dat dey reject all sincerity bekase it begins wid sin.

What am de fashion signs? Why, de ladies am so fond ob payin visits dat dey war 'em on dar backs, an dey am so economical dat dey carry five yard purses, so dat dey can't get down to de money to spend it.

But gold am de fashionable fever; de epidemical confluensa; everybody splits his calabash for California's goold diggins; de miners dig de earth's pockets, and speck-letator's dig de miner's pockets. Now I'll splain to you how all dis discovery come for to be uncovered:—You'se all heard ob dem spots in de sun what ain't sunny spots. Well, de kase ob dat was, dat de sun one day in 'October, looked eleventeen hours in a

mortified tater field, an cotch de tater rot in his face, an bein somewhat short ob sunshine, he throwed a sun-set, turned himself behind his back, an dis brought his gold side to de airth, an de fect ob dat was, dat it gold-vanized de bowels ob de airth an distracted all de goold from de centre toward de surface darof, an jis stumped his toe again a lump ob de dust, an it turned yaller, an fell agin a white man, dat white man fell agin anudder, an everybody become goold struck, and 'come 'fected wid goold yaller ganders, an eber since arter dat, de whole at-most-fear 'come pregnated wid gold. De sun am gold mounted, de gals wear gold in dar gums, de gemmen tie demselves fast to dar watches by gold ropes, an de wedder rooster ob dar minds all point toward California, an de great metal physical question dat seems to us, is am wedder de gold bug or de hum-bug will soonest make de human bug come out a big bug.

Publishers Dick and Fitzgerald advertised *Tambo's End Men's Ministrel Gags* as "a complete Hand-Book of Burnt Cork Drollery, which will be found alike useful to the professional and amateur. Everything new and rich," for thirty cents in paper covers or fifty cents cloth. The exchange between Brudder Tambo and Brudder Bones, the two "musicians" at the ends of the semicircular "line," was typical minstrel humor.

Minstrel Gags and End Men's Hand-Book. Being a collection of Ethiopian Dialogues, Plantation Scenes, Eccentric Scenes, Humorous Lectures, Laughable Interludes, End Men's Jokes, Burlesque Speeches, Witticisms, Conundrums, Yarns, Plantation Songs and Dances, etc. (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1875), 60–62.

Blackberrying

"Ah! Tambo, she's gone dead."

"Is she dead, Bones?"

"Yes, Tambo. She sent for me three days after she died."

"Oh, no, Bones, you mean three days previous to her decease."

"No; she had no niece; she was an orphan."

"I mean three days before she departed this earthly tenement."

"Sir?"

"That is three days before she died."

"Oh, yes! Well, I went down to see her; went up to de bedside wid de bed in my eyes."

"You mean with the tears in your eyes?"

"Yes, wid de pillows in my eyes. Sez she,'Bones, I'm goin' to leave this world of care'."

"What did you reply?"

"I sed I didn't care much. Den she axed me if I would go down to the 'pothecary shop for some medicine. I sed yes; so I went down to Dr. Night Bell—"

"No, not to Dr. Night Bell; that's the name of the bell on the door—the night bell."

"Well, I called him 'Dr. Night Bell,' anyhow."

"I presume he was a pretty good physician?"

"No, he wasn't fishin', he was home."

"Oh, no, I mean he was a physician of some note."

"Yes, he was counting out his notes when I went in."

"No, Bones, you do not understand. I mean he was a doctor of some standing."

"No, he wasn't standin', he was sittin' on a three-legged stool."

"Well, what did the doctor give you?"

"He gabe me a piece of paper."

"A prescription?"

"No, it was paper."

"Of course, it was on paper, but nevertheless a prescription. What did it say on the paper?"

"It was full of chalk-marks made wid a pencil. He sed I must get two dozen fish-hooks, No. 7, and put them in a quart ob molasses an boil it down, den gib her de broth, so I went up to de bar—"

"No, you mean the counter."

"He didn't count dem; he weighed 'em out."

"Well, was there any efficacy in the dose?"

"No: noffin' in it but fish-hooks!"

"I mean was the medicine any way efficacious?"

"Now, look here, Tambo, be so kind as to 'dress me in de English language."

"Well, then, Bones, I mean did the medicine do her any good?"

"It wouldn't have cured her, but the poor gal in an absence of mind, instead of takin' the broth, took de fish-hooks, and dey killed her."

"Then that must have been her funeral I saw last Wednesday?"

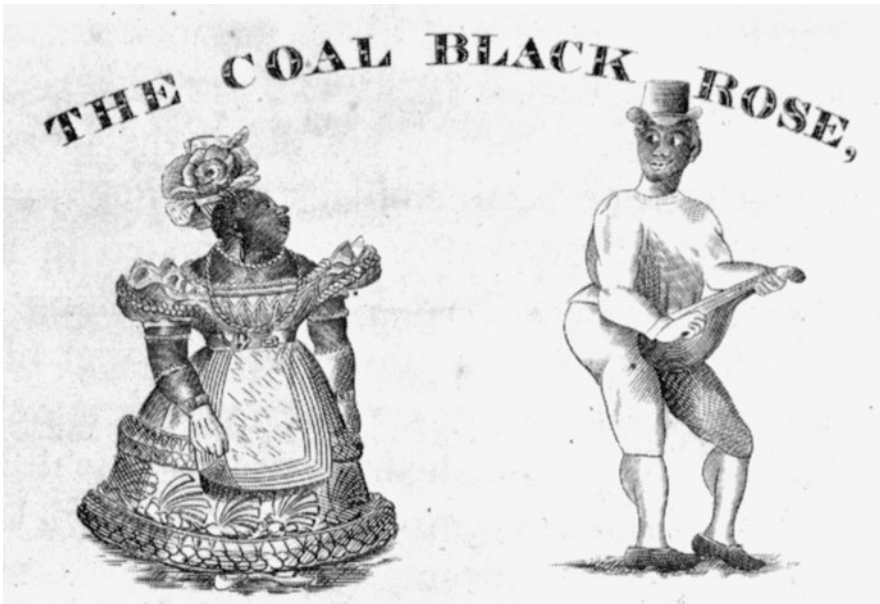
"No, it wasn't. De doctor says I can't bury her until next summer."

"Why not, Bones?"

"Kase dat's de best time to go out *Blackberryin'*."

The farce, *Oh, Hush! or, the Virginny Cupids*, went through several stages of evolution. George Washington Dixon expanded his "Coal Black Rose" (1827) into a skit, *Love in a Cloud* (1829), and then a longer farce, *The Duel; or, Coal Black Rose*. Thomas D. Rice performed it as *Long-Island Juba; or, Love in a Bushel* in 1833, and it remained popular from the late 1840s to the 1870s. Christy and Wood's Minstrels, the most successful troupe of their time, gave it as *The Virginia Cupids; or, The Rival Darkies* in 1853. Charles White was a minstrel impresario of note, and published dozens of his arrangements of old farces, probably little changed from earlier acting versions.

Charles White, *Oh! Hush! Or, The Virginny Cupids: an operatic olio in one act and three scenes arranged by Charles White* (New York: Happy Hours, 1873).



Illustrations of African Americans in minstrel songsheets like George Washington Dixon's "Coal Black Rose" in the 1830s were unflatteringly grotesque. The Free Library of Philadelphia.

OH, HUSH!
OR,
THE VIRGINNY CUPIDS.
an operatic olio,
in one act, and three scenes,
arranged by CHARLES WHITE.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
SAMBO JOHNSON (a retired bootblack)
CUFF (a boss bootblack)
PETE WILLIAMS (Cuff's foreman)
COLONEL BEN (an old polisher)
MISS DINAH ROSE (a fascinating wench)
KNIGHTS OF THE BRUSH

SCENE 1

Street. THE CHARACTERS *discovered blacking boots, some sitting down*. SAM JOHNSON *sits on a chair, R, his feet resting on a barrel. He is reading a newspaper which he holds upside down*. ALL *laugh and begin to get up as the curtain rises.*

CUFF. Pete, I hab been round to all the hotels to-day, an' I got so many boots to black by four o'clock dat I don't tink I can do it. Now, den, boys, if you polish dem by dat time, I'll gib you all a holiday dis ebenin'.

PETE. Ah! dat's right, Cuff, we'll gib'em de shine ob de best Day and Martin—but, Cuff, gib us a song.

CUFF (*sings*).

Come all you Virginny gals, and listen to my noise,
Neber do you wed wid de Carolina boys;
For if dat you do, your portion will be,
Cowheel and sugar cane, wid shangolango tea.

FULL CHORUS.
Mamzel ze marrel-ze bunkum sa?
Mamzel ze marrel-ze bunkum sa?

When you go a courting, de pretty gals to see,
You kiss 'em and you hug 'em like de double rule oh free.
De fust ting dey ax you when you are sitting down,
is, ''Fetch along de Johnny cake—it's gitting radder brown.''
CHORUS—Mamzel ze marrel, etc.

Before you are married, potatoes dey am cheap,
But money am so plenty dat you find it in the street.
But arter you git married, I tell you how it is—
Potatoes dey am berry high, and sassengers is riz.

CHORUS—Mamzel ze marrel, etc.

CUFF (*turning round after the song, discovers JOHNSON*). I say, Pete, who is dat consumquencial darkey ober dar, dat is puttin' on so many airs?

PETE. I don't know, Cuff. He stopped here a few minutes arter you went away, an' he'been reading dar eber since. Speak to him.

CUFF (*approaching* JOHNSON, *scrutinizes his person*). Why, it am Sam Johnson!

ALL. Sam Johnson!

CUFF. Yes, to be sure it am.

JOHNSON (*looking through his eyeglass*). Gemblem, is you distressing your conversation to me?

CUFF. Yes, sar, I is distressing my observation to you inderwidually, collectively, skientifically and alone. (*Seats himself on the barrel.*)

JOHNSON (*rising*). Well, sar, den I would hab you to know dat my name, sar, is Mr. Samuel Johnson, Exquire, an' I don't wish to be addressed by such—(*pointing to*

crowd) low, common, vulgar trash! You had better mind your business and brack your filthy boots. (*He sits down again.*)

CUFF (*gets off the barrel*). I say, Pete, I'll tell you whar I seed dat darkey. He used to work in de same shop wid me for old Jake Simmons, but he drawed a high prize in de lottery, and retired from de 'spectable perfession of bracking boots. De last time I seed him he was down in old Virginny on a coon hunt. I'll tell you suffin' 'bout it. (*He sings.*)

'Way down in old Virginny, 'twas in de arternoon,
Oh! Roley, boley!
Wid de gun dat massa gib me, I went to shoot the coon.

CHORUS.
Wid my hiddy-co-dink-er—mi! who dar?
Good-mornin', ladies fair.
Wid my hiddy-co-dink-er—mi! who call?
Good-mornin', ladies all.

He sat on a pine branch, whistlin' a tune,
Oh! Roley, boley!
I up wid my gun, and brought down Mr. Coon.

CHORUS.—Wid my hiddy-co-dink-er, etc.

PETE. I tell you what, Cuff; speak to him in a more eliphant manner.

CUFF. Yes, I will. (*goes over to* JOHNSON *in his best style*) Johnson! (*no answer*) Mr. Johnson! (*no answer*) I'll fetch him dis time, Pete. Mr. Samuel Johnson, Exquire!

JOHNSON (*rises and bows politely*). Sar, I am at your sarbice.

CUFF. Excuse my interrupting you, for I see you am busy readin' de paper. Would you be so kind as to enlighten us upon de principal topicks ob de day?

JOHNSON. Well, Mr. Cuff, I hab no objection, 'kase I see dat you common unsophisticated gemmen hab not got edgemcation yourself, and you am 'bliged to come to me who has. So spread around, you unintellumgent bracks, hear de news ob de day discoursed in de most fluid manner. (*He reads out some local items.*) Dar has been a great storm at sea and de ships hab been turned upside down. CUFF (*looks at the paper*). Why, Mr. Johnson, you've got the paper upside down. (ALL *laugh heartily.*)

JOHNSON. Well, yes, so I is. Golly! I didn't take notice ob dat. (*He starts with amazement.*) Oh, what do I see? Has de perfession come to dis degraded persition?

ALL *(shout).* What is it?

JOHNSON. Does my eyes deceibe me! Bracking boots on de Canal street plan for free cents a pair!

ALL (*grab at the paper, which is torn in pieces, and cry*). Whar? Wharabouts?

CUFF. I say, Pete, I can't see nuffin' like dat here. (*to* JOHNSON*)* Mr. Johnson, show me dat? (*holds the torn piece to him*)

JOHNSON. Oh, I can't show you now—it's torn out.

CUFF. It won't do, Mr. Johnson. Say, darkeys, don't you tink dat nigger am in lub?

ALL. Yes, yes! (JOHNSON *paces the stage in anger*.) CUFF *sings*.

Sam Johnson, why so solitacious?
Hah, hah, hah, hah, hah?
'Tis lub dat makes you so vexatious,
Sam Johnson, ho!

Does your lub lib in Philumdelphy?
Hah, hah, hah, hah, hah?
Oh! is she poor, or am she wealthy?
Sam Johnson, ho!

Now, gib him boots and make him travel,
Hah, hah, hah, hah, hah!
Oh, chuck dem at him widout cavil,
Sam Johnson, ho!

(JOHNSON *exits*. ALL *throw a perfect shower of boots at* JOHNSON *as soon as he leaves, and begin laughing*.)

CUFF. Dar he goes, Pete. I radder guess Mr. Samuel Johnson, Exquire, won't trouble dis crowd any more wid his presence. (*He sings*.)

De greatest man dat eber libed was Day and Martin,
Johnny, my lango la!
For he was de fust ob de boot black startin'.
CHORUS—Johnny, my lango la!

Did you eber see a ginsling made out of brandy?
Johnny, my lango la!
Did you eber see a pretty gal lickin' lasses candy?
CHORUS—Johnny, my lango la!

FULL CHORUS.
Ah, oh—ah! ah, oh-ah! oh—oo-o-o-o!
Ah, oh—ah! ah, oh-ah! oh—oo-o-o-o!

WATCHMAN (*crosses in front, or he may sing outside*).
Past twelve o'clock and a cloudy mornin',
Johnny, my lango la!
Past twelve o'clock and de daylight dawning,
Johnny, my lango la!

CUFF (*resumes singing*).
Dat's de old watchman, we're going to fool him,
Johnny, my langolala!
If he stays outside, de weder will cool him.
CHORUS—Johnny, my langolala!

Now, cut your sticks, niggers, de daylight's dawning,
Johnny, my langolala!
We'll meet right here quite early in de mornin'.
CHORUS—Johnny, my langolala!
(ALL *exit R and L, singing very piano*.)

SCENE II

Exterior of Rose's house. Dark stage. Staccato music. JOHNSON *enters with banjo or guitar to serenade*.

JOHNSON. Tank heaben! I hab got clar ob dem ruffian darkeys at last. I neber was so grossly insulted in all my life. Dey nearly spiled my best clothes, and—but let's see, I promised to gib my lubly Rosa a serenade dis ebenin', and if I can only find de house. (*goes up to house*) Yes, here is de house—I know it from a tack in de door. (*sings*)
SONG—''LUBLY ROSA.''
Oh! lubly Rosa, Sambo has cum
To salute his lub wid his tum, tum, tum.
So open de door, Rose, and luff me in,
For de way I lub you am a sin.

ROSE (*appears at window and sings*).
Ah, who's dat knocking at my door,
Making such a noise wid his saucy jaw?
I'se looking down upon de stoop,
Like a henhawk on a chicken-coop.
So clar de kitchen.
JOHNSON.
'Tis Sambo Johnson, dearest dove,
Come like Bacchus, God of Love;
To tell his lubly Rosa how
He's quit his old perfesion now.
So clar de kitchen.
ROSE.
Oh, hold yer hat and cotch de key,
Come into de little back room wid me;
Sit by de fire and warm your shin,

And on de shelf you'll find some gin.
So clar de kitchen.

(*She drops the key*. JOHNSON *catches it in his hat and exits in house*.)

SCENE III

Interior of Rose's house. Table set—cups and saucers for two—two chairs.

CUFF (*enters R, and sings*).
SONG—"COAL BLACK ROSE!"
I wonder whar de debil my lubly Rosa's gone,
She's luff me half an hour sittin' all alone.
If she don't come back an' tell me why she didn't stay wid me,
I'll drink all de sassengers and eat up all de tea.

CHORUS.
Oh, Rose! you coal-black Rose!
I neber lub a gal like I lub dat Rose.

ROSE (*enters R, and sings*).
Now, get up you Cuffy, and gib up dat chair,
Mr. Johnson'll pay de dickens if he cotch you sitting dar.
CUFF.
I doesn't fear de devil, Rose, luff alone dat Sam.
If dat nigger fool his time wid me, I'll hit him
I'll be—(*breaks a plate*)

CHORUS—Oh, Rose, etc.

ROSE. Now, get you in de cupboard, Cuff, a little while to stay,
I'll give you plenty applejack when Sambo's gone away.
CUFF. I'll keep my eye upon him—if he 'tempts to kiss or hug,
I'll be down upon him like a duck upon a bug.

(ROSE *conducts* CUFF *to the closet, puts him in, and closes the door*.)

JOHNSON (*heard singing without*)—
Oh, make haste, Rose, for sure as I am born,
I'm trembling like a sweep-oh on a frosty morn.
ROSE. Walk in, Sambo, and don't stand dar a-shakin',
De fire am a-burnin' and de hoe-cake am a-bakin'.

JOHNSON (*enters left, looks around the room, and converses ad libitum; he then discovers the table, starts with surprise and sings*).

From de chairs around de table and de two cups of tea,
I see you been to supper and had some company.
ROSE. 'Twas de missionary preacher, dey call him Dr. Birch,
He come to raise a 'scription to build hisself a church.
Come sit you down, Sambo, an' tell me how you've bin.
(JOHNSON *laughs*.)
Why, la bress you, honey, what does make you grin?
JOHNSON. I'd laugh to tink if you was mine, my dear, my lub, my Rose,
I'd gib you eberyting dat's nice, de Lord above knows,
Dar's possum fat an' hominy, and sometimes—
CUFF (*sings out from closet*). Rice!
JOHNSON. Cowheel an' sugar cane, an' eberyting dat's—
CUFF (*sings out from the closet*). Nice!
JOHNSON (*gets up, comes front and sings*).
I thought I heard a noise, Rose, it come from ober dar,
ROSE. It was de plaster fallin' down upon de chair.
JOHNSON. But it hollered out rice! as sure as I'm Sambo.
ROSE. It was dat nigger Cuffy upstairs, dat jumps Jim Crow.
JOHNSON. I wish I was a glove, Rose, upon dat lubly hand,
I'd be de happiest nigger ob all in dis land.
My bosom am so full ob lub—'twould soon find some relief,
When you took de glove to wipe your nose instead ob a handkerchief.
CHORUS—Oh, Rose, etc.
ROSE. My love is strong, and of it's strength dar's none but you can tell.
CUFF. Half past twelve o'clock and all's not well.
JOHNSON. Dat's de old watchman took me up de udder night.
CUFF. Half past twelve o'clock, dar's going to be a fight.
CHORUS—Oh, Rose, etc.
ROSE. Johnson, now you'd better go, for you see it's getting late,
An' missus will be coming home from de freminate.
JOHNSON. Well, gib me one kiss, Rose—(*tries to kiss her*).
ROSE. Why, Sam, what is you at?
JOHNSON. Why, I'll hug you like a grizzly—what de debil noise am dat?
(CUFF *is trying to get down the gun from shelf, falls down and spills the flour over him*. JOHNSON *gets up stage, brings* CUFF *down front and sings*.)
Who is you, and from whar did you cum?
ROSE. Oh, it am dat nigger Cuff—forever I'm undone.
CUFF. I'se been out whitewashin' an' feelin' a little tire,
I merely cum to ax Miss Rose for a shobelful ob fire.

JOHNSON. Tell me, you saucy nigger, how you do on dat shelf?
CUFF. I was pretty well, I thank you, pray, how do you find yourself?
JOHNSON. Come, no prevarication or I'll smash dat calabash.
ROSE. Oh, Johnson, be advised by me—he's noffin's else but trash.
JOHNSON. Is dis your constancy, Miss Rose, you tell me ob all day!
CUFF. Why, de wench she am dumbfounded, and don't know what to say.
ROSE. I neber saw his face before—his berry sight I hates
I believe he am a runaway from de nullifying States.
CUFF. Say, tell me, Mr. Johnson, what dat nigger jaculates?
JOHNSON. Why, she says you am a runaway from de nullifyin' States.
CUFF. Dat's enuff to make a jaybird split his shin in two,
For here's my free papers dat I carry in my shoe.
(*shows his papers*)
CHORUS—Oh, Rose, etc.
By dat darkey's peroration and his sarcarmastus grin,
1'll bet he gets a lickin' afore he does begin.
JOHNSON. Be off, you common nigger!
CUFF. Not until we hab a fight.
And, Rose, don't you interfere, I'll show dis moke a sight.
(*clinches* JOHNSON, *and they fight*)
ROSE (*screams, seizes frying pan, and strikes* CUFF *over his head, breaking the bottom*).
Fire! help! murder, suicide, all sorts ob death!
JOHNSON. Stand off, you common nigger, gib me time to draw a breff.
(PETE *and* OTHERS *enter*.)
PETE. What's de matter, Rose, dat you gib dat Injun yelp?
ROSE. Why, it's Cuffy killin' Sambo, and I was cryin' out for help.
PETE (*raises and supports* CUFF, *while someone does the same to* JOHNSON).
Cuffy, is you much hurt?
CUFF. Oh, no, I'm only drawing my last breff. You'd better take me to the hoss-pistol.
PETE. Why, Cuff!
CUFF. Oh, I don't know; but I hardly tink I shall live more dan twenty-five years longer. (CUFF *and* JOHNSON *have now regained their feet*.)
JOHNSON (*starts*). Why, Cuff!
CUFF. Why Johnson!
JOHNSON. Rose, my love, pray tell me how this cum so?
ROSE. Well, dear, I will, since you really want to know:
You see, he sweeps de street, and blacks de gemmen's shoes,
But when he gets de liquor in, he don't know what he does.
CUFF (*sings to* ROSE).
If I'd married you, Miss Rose, I'd surely had a curse,

I offered for to take you for better or for worse;
But I was blind wid lub, your faults I couldn't see.
You is a deal sight worser dan I took you for to be.
CHORUS—Oh, Rose, etc.

JOHNSON (*crosses over to* CUFF*).* Mr. Cuff, I ax your pardon.

CUFF. Mr. Johnson, dar's my hand. An Rose, I'm glad to find my head was harder dan your pan. But dar's no use to keep up grievances, since love am all by chance. So jest hand down de fiddle, Pete, and let us hab a dance. Come, darks, take your places and I'll saw the catgut.

(*They form and go through a reel.* CUFF *gets excited while* ROSE *and* JOHNSON *are dancing, and, jumping up, he breaks the fiddle over* JOHNSON*'s head.* ROSE *faints and is caught by* SOME ONE. JOHNSON *falls at her feet.* CUFF *stands with uplifted hands.*)

ALL FORM PICTURE

Commentary: Rise and Fall of "Slave" Creativity

The New York *Knickerbocker* interpreted the popularity of minstrels in England as recognition of the New World's potential for genuinely original cultural achievements. The best of America's writers had composed in the English idiom, and distinguished as many were, their poetry was not "*peculiarly* of America." Now, at last, here was an answer to the Rev. Sydney Smith's jibe. Most of the minstrel songs were copied from the slaves who, because of their isolation and ignorance, had little contact with European literature. These were most certainly "strongly of the locality" and uniquely American.

[J. K.], "Who Are Our National Poets?" *Knickerbocker* 26 (October 1845): 331–32, 335–36, 341.

Foreigners read BRYANT, and HALLECK, and LONGFELLOW, and hearing these called our best poets, and perceiving nothing in their poems which might not just as well have been written in England, or by Englishmen, they infer that as the productions of those who stand highest among our poets have nothing about them which savors *peculiarly* of America, therefore America has no national poetry; a broad conclusion from narrow premises. . . .

Applying this rule to America, in which class of our population must we look for our truly original and American poets? What class is most secluded from foreign influences, receives the narrowest education, travels the shortest distance from home, has the least amount of spare cash, and mixes least with any class above itself? Our negro slaves, to be sure! *That* is the class in which we must expect to find our original poets, and there we do find them. From that class come the Jim Crows, the Zip

Coons, and the Dandy Jims, who have electrified the world. From them proceed our only truly national poets.

When Burns was *discovered,* he was immediately taken away from the plough, carried to Edinburgh, and feted and lionized to the ''fulness of satiety.'' James Crow and Scipio Coon never were discovered, personally; and if they had been, their owners would not have spared them from work. Alas! that poets should be ranked with horses, and provided with owners accordingly! In this, however, our negro poets are not peculiarly unfortunate. . . .

Who is the man of genius? He who utters clearly that which is dimly felt by all. He who most vividly represents the sentiment, intellect and taste of the public to which he addresses himself. He to whom all hearts and heads respond. Take our ''national poets,'' for example, who being unknown individually, we may personify collectively as the American SAMBO. Is not Sambo a genius? All tastes are delighted, all intellects are astonished, all hearts respond to his utterances; at any rate, all pianofortes do, and a hundred thousand of the sweetest voices in christendom. What more convincing proof of genius was ever presented to the world? Is not Sambo the incarnation of the taste, intellect and heart of America, the ladies being the judges? Do not shrink from the answer, most beautiful, accomplished, delicate and refined lady-reader! You cannot hold yourself above him, for you imitate him; you spend days and weeks in learning his tunes; you trill his melodies with your rich voice; you are delighted with his humor, his pathos, his irresistible fun. Say truly, incomparable damsel! is not Sambo the realization of your poetic ideal?

But our national melodists have many imitators. Half of the songs published as theirs are, as far as the words are concerned, the productions of ''mean whites''; but base counterfeits as they are, they pass current with most people as genuine negro songs. Thus is it ever with true excellence! . . . Every imitator acknowledges the superior excellence of his model. The greater the number of imitators, the stronger is the evidence of that superiority; the warmer their reception by the public, the more firmly becomes established the genius of the original.

But the music and the dancing are all Sambo's own. No one attempts to introduce any thing new *there*. In truth they, with the chorus, constitute all that is essentially permanent in the negro song. The blacks themselves leave out old stanzas, and introduce new ones at pleasure. Travelling through the South, you may, in passing from Virginia to Louisiana, hear the same tune a hundred times, but seldom the same words accompanying it. This necessarily results from the fact that the songs are unwritten, and also from the habit of extemporizing, in which the performers indulge on festive occasions. Let us picture one of these scenes, which often occur on the estates of kind masters, seldom on those of the cruel. So true is this, that the frequent sound of the violin, banjo, or jaw-bone lute, is as sure an indication of the former, as its general absence is of the latter. . . .

Give heed to foreign reviewers; doubt no longer that nationality is the highest merit that poetry can possess; uneducate yourselves; consult the taste of your fair

countrywomen; write no more English poems; write negro songs, and Yankee songs in negro style; take lessons in dancing of the celebrated Thomas Rice; appear upon the stage and perform your own operas; do this, and not only will fortune and fame be yours, but you will thus vindicate yourselves and your country from the foul imputation under which both now rest! With *your* names on the list with Crow and Coon, who *then* will dare to say that America has no national poets?

Ten years later, a writer in *Putnam's Monthly* also believed that the original, "ancient" minstrel songs of the 1820s and 1830s had authentic folk roots in the plantation songs of southern black slaves. However, Y. S. Nathanson believed a far greater proportion of the songs of the 1840s had been "peculiar, genuine and unadulterated," and was dismayed that current offerings were so inferior to the "ancient" minstrel compositions.

[Y. S. Nathanson], "Negro Minstrelsy—Ancient and Modern," *Putnam's Monthly* 5 (January 1855): 72–74, 75–76, 79.

It is now some eighteen or twenty years since an enterprising Yankee . . . produced upon the boards of one of our metropolitan theatres, a musical sketch entitled ''Jim Crow.'' . . . To those (if there can be any such) who are unacquainted with its character and general scope, it may be proper to remark that ''Jim Crow'' is what may be called a dramatic song, depending for its success, perhaps more than any play ever written for the stage, upon the action and mimetic powers of the performer. Its success was immediate and marked. It touched a chord in the American heart which had never before vibrated, but which now responded to the skilful fingers of its first expounder. . . . Popularity like this laughs at anathemas from the pulpit, or sneers from the press. The song which is sung in the parlor, hummed in the kitchen, and whistled in the stable, may defy oblivion. But such signal and triumphant success can produce but one result. Close upon the heels of Jim Crow, came treading, one after the other, ''Zip Coon,'' ''Long-Tailed Blue,'' ''Ole Virginny neber tire,'' ''Settin' on a Rail,'' and a host of others, all of superior merit, though unequaled alike in their intrinsic value, and in their participation in public approval. The golden age of negro literature had commenced. Thenceforward for several years the appearance of a new melody was an event whose importance can hardly be appreciated by the coming generation. It flew from mouth to mouth, and from hamlet to hamlet, with a rapidity which seemed miraculous. . . .

The prevailing characteristics of the melodies which this period produced are their perfect and continual lightness, spirit, and good humor; but the true secret of their favor with the world is to be found in the fact that they are genuine and real. They are no useless and ridiculous imitations forged in the dull brain of some northern self-styled minstrel, but the veritable tunes and words which have lightened the labor of some weary negro in the cotton fields, amused his midnight hours as he fished, or waked the spirits of the woods as he followed in the track of the wary racoon. It is . . . impossible to counterfeit, or successfully imitate, one of these songs. . . .

In the terseness and fitness of the language, the oft-repeated idiomatic expressions, the occasional looseness and negligence in respect to rhyme, the carelessness and license in the metre, and above all, in the incoherence of the constantly recurring refrain, the lover of negro minstrelsy is constantly reminded of the old, plain songs which Shakespeare loved. . . .

The lightness and prevailing good humor of the negro songs, have been before remarked upon. A true southern melody is seldom sentimental, and never melancholy. And this results directly from the character and habits of the colored race. No hardships or troubles can destroy, or even check their happiness and levity. . . .

In or about the year 1841, a descriptive ballad, entitled ''Ole Dan Tucker,'' first made its appearance, and speedily acquired a renown and popularity hardly excelled, even by that of ''Jim Crow.'' This may be partly attributable to the fact that less histrionic talent is required to give it a fitting interpretation, and partly to its intrinsic worth. In some respects Ole Dan Tucker may be regarded as the best of what I have denominated the ancient negro ballads. The melody was far superior to anything that had preceded it. In its vivacity and liveliness, the music occasionally reminds us of some of Donizetti's happiest efforts, while its simplicity and quaintness at times breathe of Auber. The words, too, came more dearly home to the heart of the American people, than those of its predecessors. The song, it is needless to say, consists of a series of vivid pictures, disconnected in themselves, varying as rapidly as the changes in a kaleidoscope, and yet presenting to us the character of the hero, as a most artistic whole. The most searching test of popularity can be applied to ''Ole Dan Tucker'' with perfect confidence. It has been sung, perhaps, oftener than any melody ever written.

I have said that this was in some aspects the best of these songs. It was the last. With that ballad African minstrelsy may be said to have culminated. From that period its decline and fall was rapid and saddening. Hardly a song has been produced since that time which does not present the most glaring marks of barefaced and impudent imposition. . . . Vile parodies, sentimental love songs, dirges for dead wenches who are generally sleeping under the willow, on the bank of some stream, and melancholy reminiscences of negroic children fill the places once allotted to the grand old ballads of former days. . . . They have lost their country grace without acquiring a city polish. This inundation of trash has swept away in its might all the ancient landmarks of song. . . .

Instead of the lyrics which once stirred the heart of the nation, our wives and children . . . are fortunate if they get to bed without being wearied and disgusted with some crude burlesque on a popular opera, served up with vulgar caricatures of the style and manner of well-known artists. . . . It is from the purpose of negroic minstrelsy, whose end at the first was, and now ought to be, to present to the lovers of original poetry and music, a class of songs, peculiar, genuine, and unadulterated. A thoughtful, reflective man, can hardly leave one of the temples devoted to such barbaric sacrifices, without reasonable and just despondency and alarm. . . .

Commentary: Rise and Fall of "Slave" Creativity

It is earnestly to be desired that collections of genuine plantation songs may be made. The grateful incense of posterity would embalm the memory of him who should hand down to them authentic ballads, which another generation may sweep from the face of the earth forever.

The liberal *New York Tribune* considered "the black opera" the equal to Italian opera in the enjoyment it gave its audience. Unfortunately, conditions for the southern slaves who inspired such music had declined in twenty years and their more serious songs were reflected in the loss of inspiration and originality in the large minstrel troupes. At its best, the music of the "Ethiopian" banjo had been as expressive as the "lyre of the ancients" and appealed to the young.

"The Black Opera," *New York Tribune*, June 30, 1855.

Absurd as may seem negro minstrelsy to the refined musician, it is nevertheless beyond doubt that it expresses the peculiar characteristics of the negro as truly as the great masters of Italy represent their more spiritual and profound nationality. And although the melody of ''Long-tailed Blue'' may not possess the intellectual properties of an aria by Bellini, yet it will contain as much truth to the humanity of which it assumes to be the exponent, and quite as much enthusiasm will be manifested by its listeners. . . .

Mr. T. D. Rice made his debut in a dramatic sketch entitled ''Jim Crow,'' and from that moment everybody was ''doing just so,'' and continued ''doing just so'' for months, and even years afterward. Never was there such an excitement in the musical or dramatic world; nothing was talked of, nothing written of, and nothing dreamed of but ''Jim Crow.'' The most sober citizens began to ''wheel about, and turn about, and Jump Jim Crow.'' It seemed as though the entire population had been bitten by the tarantula; in the parlor, in the kitchen, in the shop and in the street, Jim Crow monopolised public attention. It must have been a species of insanity, though of a gentle and pleasing kind, for it made hearts lighter, and merrier, and happier; it smoothed away frowns and wrinkles, and replaced them with smiles. Its effects were visible alike on youth and age.

The success of Mr. Rice called out numerous imitators. . . . The homeliness, the truthfulness of these compilations, established their popularity. There was nothing factitious in them; they filled a void in public amusement, which was beginning to be sensibly experienced, and from their very naturalness, appealed to the sympathy of the multitude. Particularly was this the case with the younger portion of our population, most of whom have grown up to be men and women since then. For if the songs were of a humorous character, it was humor of a gushing, positive kind—boisterous fun, just suited to the exuberant nature of youth, and not without its effect upon the risibilities of the oldest; or if the air was a saddened one, there was a pathos in its mournful simplicity, quite as impressive as any waves of melody which ever gushed

from the soul of a composer. Who has not often observed the tear of sensibility moistening the cheek of youth, while listening to the primitive strains of ''Uncle Ned''—that poor old colored gentleman, who has gone ''where the good darkies go''? Ah, these tears constituted one of the blessings of that youth, which has now departed. Sorrow and disappointment have doubtless weighed heavily upon many a heart since that spring of life passed away, with its smiles and tears. We can no longer smile at ''Lucy Neal,'' nor weep at the pathetic story of ''Uncle Edward.'' And in the meantime, has there been no change in the feelings of the true originators of this music—the negroes themselves? Are the great mass of those held to labor on Southern plantations the same careless, brutalized race they were twenty years ago? We believe not. Let the Southern traveler of to-day compare notes with one who went over the ground even ten years ago, and he will find a striking change in the mental characteristics of this unhappy people. The gay laugh and cheerful song are not heard with former frequency; there is loss of that noisy exuberance which not long since was regarded as a trait in the African disposition. The old, unmeaning compositions of the plantation have fallen into disuse, and if they sing now there is memory in their songs. Plaintive and slow, the sad soul of the slave throws into his music all that gushing anguish of spirit which he dare not otherwise express. And yet the careless reviewer of events, observing not the causes or consequences, mourns what he terms the decadence of national negro minstrelsy! . . .

There is some truth in the assertion that the music has deteriorated. We find that Miss Nancyism of vulgarity assuming a place in the concert room among the votaries of burnt cork, bones, and banjo. The sickly sentimentality which has of late characterized the productions of the majority of these companies, so well as the wholesale plagiarism of music now sysytematically pursued, has had the impact of injuring the claims of minstrelsy to originality. Let us hope that this will not be longer tolerated by the directors of the colored orchestra.

Reminiscences

Ralph Keeler was only twelve years old, orphaned and living with a relative in Detroit, when he witnessed minstrel song and dance. Constant practice and a natural talent for dance allowed him to escape being a newspaper seller and to enjoy a brief show business career with a series of small minstrel companies traveling on railroads and riverboats throughout the South and West in the early 1850s.

Ralph Keeler, "Three Years as a Negro Minstrel," *Atlantic Monthly* 24 (July 1869): 71, 73–74, 75, 77.

Negro minstrels were, I think, more highly esteemed at the time of which I am about to write than they are now; at least, I thought more of them then, both as

individuals and as ministers to public amusement, than I have ever since. The first troupe of the kind I saw was the old ''Kunkels,'' and I can convey no idea of the pleasurable thrill I felt at the banjo solo and the plantation jig. I resolved on the spot to be a negro minstrel. . . . Meanwhile I bought a banjo, and had pennies screwed on the heels of my boots, and practised ''Jordan'' on the former, and the ''Juba'' dance with the latter, till my boarding-house keeper gave me a warning. . . . It may be owned that I had no natural aptness for the banjo, and was always an indifferent player; but for dancing I had, I am confident, such a remarkable gift as few have ever had. Up to this day, I do not think I ever have seen a step done by man or woman that I could not do as soon as I saw it,—not saying, of course, how gracefully. . . .

I was still so small of stature, and yet capable of producing so much noise with the coppers on my heels, that, by the wholesale clerks and young bloods about town, I was considered in the light of a prodigy, and made to shuffle my feet at almost all hours and in almost all localities. It was by this means, at some place of convivial resort, that I attracted the notice and admiration of a conductor on the Michigan Southern and Northern Indiana Railroad. He determined to have so much talent with him all the time, and prevailed upon me to be his train-boy [selling books and papers]. . . .

[In a Toledo bar, he met Johnny Booker and joined his minstrel troupe for five dollars and expenses a week.] It is impossible to convey an idea of the gratified ambition with which I prepared for my first appearance on the stage. The great Napoleon, in the coronation robes which can be seen any day in the Tuileries, was not prouder than I made my initial bow before the foot-nights, in my small Canton flannel knee-pants, cheap lace, gold tinsel, corked face, and woolly wig. I do not remember any embarrassment, for I was only doing in public what I had already done for the majority of the audience in private. . . .

We now started on our travels, staying from one night to a week in a city, according to its size, stopping always at the best hotels, and leading the merriest of lives generally. . . . It was deemed a good advertisement, as well as in some metaphysical way conducive to the morale of the company, to dress as nearly alike as we could, when off the stage. This had the effect, as will be readily understood, of pointing me out more prominently than ever as the juvenile prodigy, whose portrait and assumed name were plastered about over the towns and cities through which we took our triumphal march. The first part of our performances we gave with white faces, and I had so improved my opportunities that I was now able to appear as the Scotch girl in plaid petticoats, who executes the inevitable Highland fling in such exhibitions. By practising in my room through many tedious days, I learned to knock and spin and toss about the tambourine on the end of my forefinger; and having rehearsed a budget of stale jokes, I was promoted to be one of the ''end-men'' in the first part of the negro performances. . . . In addition to my jig, I now appeared in all sorts of *pas de deux*, took the principal part in negro ballets, and danced ''Lucy Long.'' I am told that I looked the wench admirably.

MINSTRELSY

In late 1906 Mark Twain dictated memories of his youth. In these autobiographical fragments, published posthumously, he remembered fondly the first minstrels he had seen as a small boy in Hannibal, Missouri, in the early 1840s. Twain's mother, however, respected the sentiments of the fundamentalist denominations and regarded both the circus and the minstrel show as hostile to religion and morality.

Mark Twain in Eruption: Hitherto Unpublished Pages about Men and Events, ed. Bernard de Voto (New York: Harper and Row, 1940), 110–18.

[T]he real nigger show—the genuine nigger show, the extravagant show, the extravagant nigger show—the show . . . to me had no peer and whose peer has not yet arrived, in my experience. We have the grand opera; and I have witnessed and greatly enjoyed the first act of everything which Wagner created, but the effect on me has always been so powerful that one act was quite sufficient; whenever I have witnessed two acts I have gone away physically exhausted; and whenever I have ventured an entire opera the result has been the next thing to suicide. But if I could have the nigger show back again in its pristine purity and perfection, I should have but little further use for opera. It seems to me that to the elevated mind and the sensitive spirit, the hand organ and the nigger show are a standard and a summit to whose rarefied altitude the other forms of musical art may not hope to reach.

I remember the first negro musical show I ever saw. It must have been in the early forties. It was a new institution. In our village of Hannibal we had not heard of it before, and it burst upon us as a glad and stunning surprise.

The show remained a week and gave a performance every night. Church members did not attend these performances, but all the worldlings flocked to them and were enchanted. Church members did not attend shows out there in those days. The minstrels appeared with coal-black hands and faces and their clothing was a loud and extravagant burlesque of the clothing worn by the plantation slave of the time; not that the rags of the poor slave were burlesqued, for that would not have been possible; burlesque could have added nothing in the way of extravagance to the sorrowful accumulation of rags and patches which constituted his costume; it was the form and color of his dress that was burlesqued. Standing collars were in fashion in that day, and the minstrel appeared in a collar which engulfed and hid the half of his head and projected so far forward that he could hardly see sideways over its points. His coat was sometimes made of curtain calico with a swallowtail that hung nearly to his heels and had buttons as big as a blacking box. His shoes were rusty and clumsy and cumbersome, and five or six sizes too large for him. There were many variations upon this costume and they were all extravagant, and were by many believed to be funny.

The minstrel used a very broad negro dialect; he used it competently and with easy facility, and it was funny—delightfully and satisfyingly funny. However, there was one member of the minstrel troupe of those early days who was not extravagantly dressed and did not use the negro dialect. He was clothed in the faultless evening costume of

the white society gentleman and used a stilted, courtly, artificial, and painfully grammatical form of speech, which the innocent villagers took for the real thing as exhibited in high and citified society, and they vastly admired it and envied the man who could frame it on the spot without reflection and deliver it in this easy and fluent and artistic fashion. ''Bones'' sat at one end of the row of minstrels, ''Banjo'' sat at the other end, and the dainty gentleman just described sat in the middle. This middleman was the spokesman of the show. The neatness and elegance of his dress, the studied courtliness of his manners and speech, and the shapeliness of his undoctored features made him a contrast to the rest of the troupe and particularly to ''Bones'' and ''Banjo.'' ''Bones'' and ''Banjo'' were the prime jokers and whatever funniness was to be gotten out of paint and exaggerated clothing they utilized to the limit. Their lips were thickened and lengthened with bright red paint to such a degree that their mouths resembled slices cut in a ripe watermelon.

The original ground plan of the minstrel show was maintained without change for a good many years. There was no curtain to the stage in the beginning; while the audience waited they had nothing to look at except the row of empty chairs back of the footlights; presently the minstrels filed in and were received with a wholehearted welcome; they took their seats, each with his musical instrument in his hand; then the aristocrat in the middle began with a remark like this:

''I hope, gentlemen, I have the pleasure of seeing you in your accustomed excellent health, and that everything has proceeded prosperously with you since last we had the good fortune to meet.''

''Bones'' would reply for himself and go on and tell about something in the nature of peculiarly good fortune that had lately fallen to his share; but in the midst of it he would be interrupted by ''Banjo,'' who would throw doubt upon his statement of the matter; then a delightful jangle of assertion and contradiction would break out between the two; the quarrel would gather emphasis, the voices would grow louder and louder and more and more energetic and vindictive, and the two would rise and approach each other, shaking fists and instruments and threatening bloodshed, the courtly middleman meantime imploring them to preserve the peace and observe the proprieties—but all in vain, of course. Sometimes the quarrel would last five minutes, the two contestants shouting deadly threats in each other's faces with their noses not six inches apart, the house shrieking with laughter all the while at this happy and accurate imitation of the usual and familiar negro quarrel, then finally the pair of malignants would gradually back away from each other, each making impressive threats as to what was going to happen the ''next time'' each should have the misfortune to cross the other's path; then they would sink into their chairs and growl back and forth at each other across the front of the line until the house had had time to recover from its convulsions and hysterics and quiet down.

The aristocrat in the middle of the row would now make a remark which was surreptitiously intended to remind one of the end men of an experience of his of a humorous nature and fetch it out of him—which it always did. It was usually an

experience of a stale and moldy sort and as old as America. One of these things, which always delighted the audience of those days until the minstrels wore it threadbare, was ''Bones's'' account of the perils which he had once endured during a storm at sea. The storm lasted so long that in the course of time all the provisions were consumed. Then the middleman would inquire anxiously how the people managed to survive.

''Bones'' would reply, ''We lived on eggs.'' ''You lived on eggs! Where did you get eggs?''

''Every day, when the storm was so bad, the Captain laid to.''

During the first five years that joke convulsed the house, but after that the population of the United States had heard it so many times that they respected it no longer and always received it in a deep and reproachful and indignant silence, along with others of its caliber which had achieved disfavor by long service.

The minstrel troupes had good voices and both their solos and their choruses were a delight to me as long as the negro show continued in existence. In the beginning the songs were rudely comic, such as ''Buffalo Gals,'' ''Camptown Races,'' ''Old Dan Tucker,'' and so on; but a little later sentimental songs were introduced, such as ''The Blue Juniata,'' ''Sweet Ellen Bayne,'' ''Nelly Bly,'' ''A Life on the Ocean Wave,'' ''The Larboard Watch,'' etc.

The minstrel show was born in the early forties and it had a prosperous career for about thirty-five years; then it degenerated into a variety show and was nearly all variety show with a negro act or two thrown in incidentally. The real negro show has been stone dead for thirty years. To my mind it was a thoroughly delightful thing, and a most competent laughter-compeller and I am sorry it is gone.

Bayard Taylor was the most renowned American travel writer of his day. During a trip to Gold Rush California, he visited the only theater in the territory in Sacramento. Miners were attracted to the nightlife shows by the drinking and gambling and by the minstrelsy, including Stephen Foster's song "Oh! Susanna" of 1847, which was one of the earliest imports from the East.

Bayard Taylor, *Eldorado, or, Adventures in the Path of Empire, comprising a voyage to California, via Panama; life in San Francisco and Monterey; pictures of the gold region; and experiences of Mexican travel* (1850; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1882), 275.

Some of the establishments have small companies of Ethiopian melodists, who nightly call upon ''Susanna!'' and entreat to be carried back to Old Virginny. These songs are universally popular, and the crowd of listeners is often so great as to embarrass the player at the monte tables and injure the business of the gamblers. I confess to a strong liking for the Ethiopian airs, and used to spend half an hour every night in listening to them and watching the curious expressions of satisfaction and delight in the faces of the overland emigrants, who always attended in a body. The spirit of the music is always encouraging; even its most doleful passages had a grotesque touch of

cheerfulness—a mingling of sincere pathos and whimsical consolation, which somehow took hold of all moods in which it might be heard, raising them to the same notch of careless good-humor. The Ethiopian melodies well deserve to be called, as they are in fact, the national airs of America. Their quaint, mock-sentimental cadences, so well suited to the broad absurdity of the words—their reckless gaiety and irreverent familiarity with serious subjects—and their spirit of antagonism and perseverance—are true expressions of the more popular sides of the national character. They follow the American race in all its emigrations, colonizations and conquests, as certainly as the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving Day. The penniless and half despairing emigrant is stimulated to try again by the sound of ''It'll never do to give it up so!'' and feels a pang of home-sickness at the burthen of the ''Old Virginia Shore.''

Musical Comedy: Harrigan's Mulligan Guard

Edward Harrigan was of distant Irish descent but grew up in New York's Lower East Side in a proud, working-class, Irish American culture. His specialty in the theater was an Irish comic and blackface minstrel. In 1871 he teamed up with Tony Hart (Anthony J. Cannon) in a highly successful partnership which lasted thirteen years. Their main repertoire was comic sketches of urban life interspersed with songs to music composed by David Braham. A ten-minute act that Harrigan wrote in 1873 was expanded into *The Mulligan Guard Ball* in 1879. Six more plays continuing the saga of the Mulligan family followed in the next two years, and two more in 1883–84. The narrative thread was the social activities surrounding the Irish-American target company led by Daniel Mulligan, and its interaction with local residents, primarily Germans and blacks. Other immigrant groups—Italians and Chinese, and, occasionally, Jews—were added to the Mulligan series in the 1880s.

Harrington's productions were formulaic. They played on what contemporaries saw as affectionate ethnic stereotypes, on garish, ill-fitting uniforms, on elements of farce—slapstick fights and explosions—and the obligatory three or four jaunty songs. *The Mulligan Guard Ball* was first performed at Broadway's Theatre Comique from January 13 to May 19, 1879, and revived twice in the 1880s. Tommy, son of Dan Mulligan, and Katy, daughter of the local German butcher, Gustavus Lochmuller, are secretly in love. The rivalry of their fathers, and the pretensions of the "colored" barber Simpson Primrose and preacher Palestine Puter, provide most of the comic interest and opportunities for song. Inadvertently, both the Irish Mulligan Guard and the black Skidmore Guard hold their annual dances in different rooms in the Harp and Shamrock hall. There are uniformed crowd roles for ill-assorted Guards and their gaudy ladies, for six "Dutch" butchers, and two blackface "wenches."

Edward Harrigan, *The Mulligan Guard Ball* (1879), in *Dramas from the American Theatre, 1762–1909*, ed. Richard Moody (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), 555–58, 559.

Act I Scene 3

A barber shop with two chairs R.H. and a hair dresser's L.H. A division piece with practical door from barber shop to hair dresser's. Set door L.H. of hair dresser's. Table and wig block with wig on in hair dresser's—and table with papers R.H. of barber shop. Hooks for coats. Barber utensils. At opening, MAGGIE KIERNEY discovered in hair dresser's combing a wig. SIM PRIMROSE brushing Skidmore uniform at table, R.H. of barber shop.

SIM: I'd give a hundred dollars to know de man dat dropped dat kerosene on dat coat. I only wore it once in parade—last 'Mancipation Day. Dar'll be some hot coons at de Skids tonight, and I wouldn't have anybody smell kerosene on me for a million dollars.

Enter Dan Mulligan and Lochmuller D. in F. [Down in Front.] Dan takes off coat, hanging it up, and Lochmuller in evening dress. Both hang clothes up without observing each other and get in chairs.

SIM: Next—[*With razor and paper, going to Lochmuller*]

DAN: Look here, sir—I'm next.

SIM: [*Going to Dan*] 'Scuse me, sir—I didn't observe—

LOCHMULLER: Here, look here once—Mr. Primrose, I'm next.

DAN: Yis, that's right, he's next after me.

LOCHMULLER: [*In chair*] No, I am next before you.

SIM: My apprentice will be here in a minute.

LOCHMULLER: No—I wont be shaved by de printer, I have got my cup and razor here—

DAN: Go on, Primrose, shave me first. If you don't, the Divel a one of the Mulligans 'ill never lather here again.

SIM: Gemmen, I'm sorry. If I was a Simese twin I could shave both.

LOCHMULLER: Shave me first. I have as much pull in de Mulligan Guard as any man in de city, and Dan Mulligan is my friend.

DAN: [*Getting up on stage from chair*] That's my name, sir—and no man is my friend.

[*Lochmuller who has got on stage*] Oh—*[Aside]* If it wasn't for the 35 dollars.

LOCHMULLER: Mister Mulligan excuse me—I thought you vas somebody vat I didn't know—

DAN: Oh, that's all right.

SIM: [*With lather and brush*] When you settle de little difference, I'm ready, gemmen—

LOCHMULLER: Oh, dat's all right. I would fight for Dan Mulligan to-morrow—or de Mulligan Guards neither.

DAN: Oh, I know that. [*Aside*] Oh, if the ball was over—

LOCHMULLER: My wife und my little boy und Katy is all dressed for de ball, und so im I, und my wife is waiting for me on de corner. So uf you will let me shave first—why—

DAN: My wife is waiting for me—and I'm not dressed yet—so I must shave first.

SIM: I'll tell you, gemmen—I'll settle it. I want no quarrelling in de shop. I'll shave one half of you, and den I'll shave half of you—den you'll both get shaved at de same time.

DAN: That's all right. Free trade and sailor's rights is all I ax for—[*Getting into chair*]

LOCHMULLER: I don't want any domestic trouble. [*Getting into chair*] I'm satisfied.

SIM: Gemmen, dar's nuffing like a mutual friend—I'll begin on Germany, if Ireland will allow me—[*Going to Lochmuller and lathering one side of his face*]

DAN: Have you the *Clipper*?

SIM: Yes [*Getting paper from table R.H.*] Dar it is, de latest. [*Gives paper to Dan. Sim begins to shave Lochmuller*]

DAN: I see here where Buck McCarthy licked the Dutch Butcher in two rounds—

LOCHMULLER: [*Sitting up*] Yes, I know, but what kind of fair play vas dat—when all de goes out men jumped in and cut de rope?

DAN: I have here the referee's decision. Money and belt given to McCarthy.

SIM: Orlando Whippletree, de colored teacher in de gymasim—I see in de *Christian Observer* has challenged McCarthy and de Butcher together.

DAN: Oh, he's a walk away for Duck.

LOCHMULLER: Do you suppose a German would fight mit a nigger?

SIM: Say, look here—do you see dis razor—I'm Sim Primrose, Captain of de Skidmore Guard. Every man of them is N. G., a nice gemman. Now I want you to apologize or I'll draw dis across your jugular.

DAN: A man has no right to insult a colored man to his face.

SIM: Take it back.

LOCHMULLER: I mean dat a colored man could whip any German in de world.

SIM: Well dat settles it. [*Getting lather and brush and going to Dan*] Now I'll take de grass off of Ireland—[*Lathers one side of Dan's face*]

LOCHMULLER: Jiminy Christmas, I can't say nutting. I must get my other side shaved—Have you got de German paper here—[*Going to table*] Yes, here is de German *Puck*—I read it. [*Sits in chair and reads. Enter Tommy Mulligan and Katrine Lochmuller in hairdresser apartment L.H.*]

KATY: Oh, Maggie—*[Kissing her]*

MAGGIE: Oh, Katy—All ready for the ball, eh—

KATY: No, not quite, just fix my hair a little.

MAGGIE: How do you do, Tommy. Sit down. [*Puts chair for Tommy near door in division piece*] Now, Katy. [*Sits Katy in chair which Maggie has vacated and fixes her hair*]

KATY: He—he—he [*Laughing*]

LOCHMULLER: I hear dat laugh before—dat's funny. [*Reads*]

MAGGIE: What's the matter, Katy?

KATY: Tell her, Tommy.

TOMMY: Maggie, Katy ain't got spunk enough to tell you—I've got to go to the Mulligan Ball with the Guards, and Katy is going with her father and mother—Well, I never put up a job like this. [*Looking at hair modestly*]

SIM: I tell you we're going to have a hot ball tonight.

DAN: [*In agony*] Yes—but look!

SIM: All de first class colored families on Sixth Avenue 'ill be dar.

DAN: [*In agony*] Hay—

TOMMY: What's that next door, Maggie?

MAGGIE: A barber shop—no body but Skidmores shave there.

TOMMY: Oh—

SIM: Dares no military organization in de world like de Skidmore Guard. [*Going to shelf*]

DAN: Oh, I thought you were talking about the Mulligans.

SIM: I never mix wid dem kind of people. 'Scuse me, gemmen, I'm out of bay rum—I'll be back in a minute. [*Exit door in flat*]

TOMMY: Well, Maggie, what I was going to say was—[*Bashfully*]

DAN: That sounds like Tommy's voice. I'll see—[*Looks through keyhole*] There's nothing there—[*Going to chair*]

TOMMY: That my old man don't want me to marry Katy, and her old man don't like me, nor my old man either—and [*Bashfully*]

DAN: [*With paper*] There is more Irish in our district than there is German, Lochmuller.

LOCHMULLER: Yes, but dare is more German babies in Avenue A, dan dare is tombstones in Greenwood Cemetery.

DAN: Well, I'll not argue—

TOMMY: And we want to know if you will come to the ball and when we run away at intermission, will you stand up for Katy—when we get married?

MAGGIE: [*Aloud*] Will I, Tommy, certainly, and I know two people who will go crazy—

KATY: Who, Maggie?

MAGGIE: Mister Mulligan and Mister Lochmuller. [*Katy and Maggie and Tommy laugh heartily. Lochmuller and Mulligan get out of chairs*]

DAN: I'll go crazy.

LOCHMULLER: Lochmuller go crazy. [*Both go to door and pull one another away twice when Dan gets a peep*]

DAN: *[Aside]* Be the mortal Harry, it's my boy Tommy with the Dutchman's daughter.

LOCHMULLER: *[Looks in keyhole. Aside]* It's my Katrine, mit Tommy Mulligan.

TOMMY: I'll give the old man the laugh—eh. Maggie? [*Laughing*]

DAN: He'll give me the laugh—Oh, if it wasn't for the thirty-five dollars.

KATY: Won't the Swiss warbler kick when he finds out I'm married, eh, Tommy?

LOCHMULLER: [*Aside*] She laugh at Mr. Krime, de baritone singer—Oh, Katrine—[*Looking at Mulligan*] Off it vas not dat I lose his custom—

TOMMY: Come, Katy, hurry—don't give it away, Maggie—Remember intermission time.

KATY: Good-bye, Maggie—[*Exit Tommy and Katy door in F. at back of hair dresser's*]

DAN: [*To Lochmuller*] I owe you thirty-five dollars, let it go—I want to ax you father to father—What do you want to let your girl come around my boy for? Let the thirty-five dollars go.

LOCHMULLER: Yes let de thirty-five dollars go—I want to know why Katrine is dare mit Tommy Mulligan.

DAN: I don't want to quarrel when I'm going out for pleasure. My wife is waiting for me.

LOCHMULLER: Und my wife is waiting for me—Und before I see my Katrine make love mit Tommy Mulligan, I kill myself mit a cleaver.

DAN: And if I find Tommy Mulligan making love to a Dutch girl, I'll lick every German from Hamburg to Gowanus.

LOCHMULLER: Maybe—maybe—

MAGGIE: [*Who has put on hat and shawl during dialogue between Mulligan and Lochmuller, enters door into barber shop*] I'll get Primrose to have an eye on the store.

Mulligan and Lochmuller seize her and bring her front

LOCHMULLER: My good woman, tell me if Katrine Lochmuller is dare—

DAN: Was it Tommy Mulligan's voice I heard in there—answer me, I'm his father—

MAGGIE: Why you must be crazy.

LOCHMULLER: Yes, she said I was crazy—But on my knees—[*Getting on knees*] Please tell me if my child Katrine was dare.

Enter Bridget Lochmuller and Gustavus Lochrnuller Jr., dressed neatly for the ball. Bridget sees Lochmuller and seizes him throwing him around. Maggie exits into hair dresser's and then exits door in back flat. Dan going up and down stage in agony. Bridget shaking Lochmuller

BRIDGET: An' is this what I married you for—A dacent Irish girl—that had her twelve dollars a week in a feather factory, and to marry you, a bologna pudding butcher—and raise a family—to find you making love on your knees to a woman here in a barber shop—Oh, Lochmuller, Lochmuller—[*Weeping*]

LOCHMULLER: Bridget my darling—hear me once—

BRIDGET: An' me all dressed for the Mulligan Ball—and little Gustavus to see his father on his knees—[*Crying*] Oh, why did I marry among the Dutch.

DAN: [*To Bridget*] Are you that man's wife?

BRIDGET: Yis—But I'll lave him.

DAN: You have a daughter Katy?

BRIDGET: I have—Oh, Katy darling, when you hear of your father—

DAN: [*On knees*] Oh, my good woman hear me. Save a father's feelings. Keep her away from Tommy Mulligan. You're a County Cork woman—don't let your daughter run away with my boy—

Lochmuller going up and down stage. Enter Mrs. Mulligan, door in flat. Mrs.

Mulligan seizes Dan Mulligan, throwing him around.

MRS. MULLIGAN: And is this what you came to get shaved for—On your knees making love to another woman in a public bath house—Oh, you wretch! [*Going to Bridget*] And you—Who are you that dares to make trouble in my family?

BRIDGET: I am Bridget Lochmuller. I'm a lady—and raise your hand to me if you dare.

MRS. MULLIGAN: I'd tear the hair out of your head.

BRIDGET: Tear it—tear it—there's me hair tear it—[*Holding her head down*]

MRS. MULLIGAN: I will—[*Pulls Bridget's hair which falls loose*]

BRIDGET: Oh, let me at her—

LOCHMULLER: [*Getting in front of her and holding her*] Bridget, my darling, I am here your husband—Gustavus Lochmuller—Don't be mad, I'm a slaughter house butcher.

DAN: [*Holding Mrs. Mulligan*] Cordelia—Cordelia, what do you mean?

MRS. MULLIGAN: Let me at her—

BRIDIGET: Let her come.

LOCHMULLER: Take your wife away, Mulligan.

DAN: If you interfere, I'll pulverize you.

Enter August Sneider, in night shirt and nightcap. Bridget and Mrs. Mulligan run off and Gustavus, Jr., door in F.

SNEIDER: What's de matter here? I can't sleep in my tailor shop.

LOCHMULLER: My wife, Bridget darling—[*Exit door in flat*]

DAN: Cordelia—Cordelia—[*Exit after Lochmuller, door in flat*]

SNEIDER: Wake me out of my sleep, Mister Primrose. I get satisfaction—[*Breaks a shaving cup. Enter Primrose, seizes him. Bus. for finish.*]

There are short comic interludes as the Mulligans and Lochmullers, man and wife, quarrel about Tommy and Katy. The entrance of the Skidmores is an excuse for a song before separate scenes of dancing at the two balls, more fighting, ending with "General melee and curtain."

Scene 4

Local street. Enter Skidmore Guard Left. Sim Primrose as Captain and Puter as Chaplain

SIM: Halt. [*Business*] Members, I ordered you to carry arms to-night at de Skidmore Fancy Ball, kase we was forced to give up Lyric Hall, and take de Harp and Shamrock. Dar's no telling how many Irish will be in hambush dare. So, going in de hall, you can put your muskets in de hat rack, and every man have his razor sharpened. No one must interfere wid our pleasure.

PUTER: I'm agin de shedding of blood, but when it comes to dem people, why, you all know me.

COMPANY: Um—Um—

CAPTAIN SIM:

Song

''Skidmore's Fancy Ball''

Here we go, so nobly, oh,
De colored Belvideres,
A number one, we carry a gun,
We beat de Fusiliers.
Talk about your dances
When we hear de cornet call,
We'll wing and wing, the dust we'll sling,
At the Skidmore Fancy Ball.

CHORUS
Hallelulah, glory, oh,
Balance down de middle,
I tell you what, um um it's hot,
Like gravy in a griddle.
Forward four, hold on de floor,
Spread out through de hall,
Every coon's as warm as June,
At the Skidmore Fancy Ball.

Supper served at one G.M.
By Brown, the caterer.
Turk and goose, oh, cut me loose,
Just lem me in de door.
Chairs reserved for ladies,
Umbrellas in de hall,
Dar's etiquette in every set,
At the Skidmore Fancy Ball.
Hands around
Keep off the ground,
We'll dance the plaster from de wall,
Get in and sail, hold your trail,
At the Skidmore Fancy Ball.
CHORUS

Every hat—when dey get at
Dis colored coterie,
Will cost a half, you needn't laugh,

Help de colored mil it ia.
We're gwine down to Newport,
Just next summer in de fall,
So follow suit and contribute
To the Skidmore Fancy Ball.
Waltz away—mazourka,
Dance de plaster from de wall,
Caledone—have a tone
At de Skidmore Fancy Ball.
CHORUS

In 1889 *Harper's Weekly* arranged a forum on the state of the theatrical arts and published the views of a few prominent American dramatists, a director, and a critic. Edward Harrigan reflected on his method and purpose in the *Mulligan* series.

"American Playwrights on the American Drama," *Harper's Weekly* [supplement] 33 (February 2, 1889): 97–98.

Perhaps the only general rule of valuing a dramatic composition is by applying the question, "Does it contain enough powerful, interesting, humorous, or beautiful features to attract and hold public attention?" This touchstone does away with all the stand-points referred to [financial and moral], and enables us to form a fair opinion of modern dramatic values.

At the outset of my career I found that whenever I tried to portray a type, I was warmly applauded by the audience, and praised by the press the next day. This, in all probability, is what gave me a decided bent, and has confined all my work to certain fields. It began with the New York "boy," the Irish-American, and our African brother. As these grew in popularity I added the other prominent types which go to make up life in the metropolis, and in every other large city of the Union and Canada. These are the Irishman, Englishman, German, Low German, Chinese, Italian, Russian, and Southern darky. I suppose ere long I shall add the Bohemian, Hungarian, Roumanian, Polak, and Scandanavian. As yet, however, their turn has not come. This system has given my pieces their peculiar polyglot character.

Though I use types and never individuals, I try to be as realistic as possible. Not only must the costuming and accessories be correct, but the speech or dialect, the personal "make-up," the vices and virtues, the habits and customs, must be equally accurate in their similarity to the facts. Each drama is a series of photographs of life today in the Empire City. As examples, the bar-room in one of the Mulligan series was copied from a saloon in Roosevelt Street, the opium den in *Investigation* [1884] from a "joint" in Pell Street, and the "dive" in *Waddy Googan* [1888] from an establishment in the neighborhood of the Bowery.

If I have given undue prominence to the Irish and negro, it is because they form

about the most salient features of Gotham humanity, and also because they are the two races who care the most for song and dance. They are at least three hundred organizations in New York like the Mulligan Guards, and probably fifty like The Full Moons.

In constructing a plot, I use one that is simple and natural—just like what happens around us every day. Sometimes I'll start with only a germ, and let it develop of its own accord as I write. While I do my best to obtain realism in the plot, I try to avoid that whose sole value is local or temporary, and construct something that will interest and amuse ten or even twenty years hence. With the plot fixed or started, and with the types and places in my mind, it is easy to construct the characters and write the piece. When my work is done, my work, unlike that of most playwrights, is just begun. The next stage is "smoothing and brightening the raw material." Here I elaborate what situations I have sketched out and create new ones, arrange antitheses between the characters and between the different scenes, increase the wit and humor of the dialogue and the fun or nonsense of the climaxes. The third stage sees it cast and rehearsed. I can now see what effect it is going to have upon an audience, and can practically realize the good points and bad. The first stage is the shortest, and the third the longest of the three.

It is seldom I use any material but what I described. Polite society, wealth, and culture possess little or no color and picturesqueness. The chief use I make of them is as a foil to the poor, the workers, and the great middle class. The average gentleman is so stereotyped that he has no value except in those plays where he is a pawn on the chess-board of melodramatic vice or tragic sin.. . . .

It may be that I have struck a new idea in confining my work to the daily life of the common people. Why some other playwright does not try the same experiment, I cannot say. Their trials and troubles, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, are more varied and more numerous than those of the Upper Ten. Whoever puts them on the stage appeals to an audience of a million. . . . And human nature is very much the same the world over. It thins out and loses all strength and flavor under the pressure of riches and luxury. It is most virile and aggressive among those who know only poverty and ignorance. It is also then the most humorous and odd. . . .

In the realism which I endeavor to employ I believe in being truthful to the laws which govern society as well as to the types of which it is composed. A playwright drops to a low level when he tries being a moralist, but to a much lower level when he gilds vice and sin and glorifies immorality. All of these are parts of life, and as such are entitled to be represented in the drama. The true realist will depict them as they are. Though he make the drunkard a source of infinite merriment to the multitude, he will not conceal the rags, misery, and disease which follow in his footsteps; though he discover virtue in criminals and tramps, he will not be blind to the qualities which outweigh and crush it down; and above all he will portray the fact that right-doing, kindness, and good-nature are in the majority, and "control the machine."

Though there are shams everywhere to be picked and ridiculed, and humbugs to

be exposed and laughed out of existence, these are only incidents which, though they appear and disappear incessantly, are not parts of the real humanity beneath. The adage ''To hold the mirror up to nature'' is as applicable to the swarming myriads of New York as to the Greek warriors before Priam's city, or the lords and nobles who surrounded the TUDORS.

William Dean Howells was editor of the middlebrow *Harper's Monthly* and one of the most influential critics. In 1886 he saluted Edward Harrigan as the last best hope of the American theater. As a practical dramatist who wrote, acted, and managed, Harrigan, Howells concluded, cared little for "the highly decorated husk and gilded shell," and was willing to sacrifice literary artifice for dramatic effect. His peculiar genius was capturing the spirit of New York in a setting "singularly perfect and entirely sufficient."

[William Dean Howells], "Editor's Study," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 73 (July 1886): 315–16.

Mr. Harrigan accurately realizes in his scenes what he realizes in his persons; that is, the actual life of this city. He cannot give it all; and he has preferred to give its Irish-American phases in their rich and amusing variety, and some of its Teutonic and African phases. It is what we call low life, though whether it is essentially lower than fashionable life is another question. But what it is, it is; and it remains for others, if they can, to present other sides of our manifold life with equal perfection; Mr. Harrigan leaves a vast part of the vast field open. In his own province we think he cannot be surpassed. The art that sets before us all sorts and conditions of New York Irishmen, from the laborers in the street to the most powerful of the ward politicians and the genteelest of the ladies of that interesting race, is . . . the joyous yet conscientious art of the true dramatist in all times who loves the life he observes. . . . Mr. Harrigan shows us the street-cleaners and contractors, the grocery-men, the shysters, the politicians, the washer-women, the servant-girls, the truckmen, the policemen, the risen Irishman and Irish woman, of contemporary New York. . . . In fact, nothing could be better than the neatness, the fineness, with which the shades of character are given in Mr. Mulligan's Irish people; and this literary consciousness is supplemented by acting which is worthy of it. Mr. Harrigan is himself a player of the utmost naturalness, delicate, restrained, infallibly sympathetic; and we have seen no one on his stage who did not seem to have been trained to his part through entire sympathy and intelligence. In certain moments of *Dan's Tribulations* the illusion is so perfect that you lose the sense of being in the theatre; you are out of that world of conventions and traditions, and in the presence of the facts.

All the Irish aspects of life are treated affectionately by this artist, as we might expect from one of his name; but the colored aspects do not fare so well under his touch. Not all the Irish are good Irish, but all the colored are bad colored people. They are of the gloomy, razor-bearing variety; full of short-sighted lies and prompt dishon-

esties, amusing always, but truculent and tricky; and the sunny sweetness which we all know in negro character is not there. . . .

In spite of such lapses, however, we recognize in Mr. Harrigan's work the spring of a true American comedy, the beginning of things which may be great things. We have more than intimated its limitations; let us say that whatever its limitations, it is never, so far as we have seen it, indecent. . . .

At any rate, loving reality as we do, we cannot do less than cordially welcome reality as we find it in Mr. Harrigan's comedies. Consciously or unconsciously, he is part of the great tendency toward the faithful representation of life which is now animating fiction.

Confessions of an African American Minstrel

By the 1880s, African American performers were becoming prominent as singers, dancers and comedians in minstrelsy. In 1896, Bert Williams and George Walker blacked up as "The Two Real Coons." Williams's success in all-black musicals, notably *In Dahomey* (1903), and his song "Nobody" (1906), established his reputation and made him a well-paid star of the prestigious Ziegfeld Follies after 1910. Williams was always conscious of his mixed-race, British-Caribbean origins and sensitive to prejudice. But as a thoughtful and consummate artiste, he explained to a prominent monthly magazine that the segregation that separated the races gave him the opportunity to articulate the views of the forgotten man, unknown to most Americans, through the medium of the minstrel fool.

Bert Williams, "The Comic Side of Trouble," *American Magazine* 85 (January 1918):, 33–34, 58–60.

One of the funniest sights in the world is a man whose hat has been knocked in or ruined by being blown off—provided, of course, it is the other fellow's hat! All the jokes in the world are based on a few elemental ideas, and this is one of them. The sight of other people in trouble is nearly always funny. This is human nature. . . . The man with the real sense of humor is the man who can put himself in the spectator's place and laugh at his own misfortunes.

That is what I am called upon to do every day. Nearly all of my comic songs have been based on the idea that I am getting the worst of it. I am the ''Jonah Man,'' the man who, even if it rained soup, would be found with a fork in his hand and no spoon in sight, the man whose fighting relatives come to visit him and whose head is always dented by the furniture they throw at each other. There are endless variations of this idea, fortunately; but if you sift them, you will find the principle of human nature at the bottom of them all. . . .

It was not until I was able to see myself as another person that my sense of humor developed. For I do not believe there is any such thing as innate humor. It has to be

developed by hard work and study, just as every other human quality. I have studied it all my life, unconsciously during my floundering years, and consciously as soon as I began to get next to myself. It is a study that I shall never get to the end of, and a work that never stops, except when I am asleep. There are no union hours to it and no let-up. It is only by being constantly on the lookout for fresh material, funny incidents, funny speeches, funny traits in human nature that a comedian can hope to keep step with his public.

I find material by knocking around in out of the way places and just listening. For among the American colored men and negroes there is the greatest source of simple amusement you can find anywhere in the world. . . . But Americans for the most part know little about the unconscious humor of the colored people and negroes, because they do not come in contact with them. . . .

Many of the best lines I have used came to me by that sort of eavesdropping. For, as I have pointed out, eavesdropping on human nature is one of the most important parts of a comedian's work. . . .

People ask me if I would not give anything to be white. I answer, in the words of the song, most emphatically, ''No.'' How do I know what I might be if I were a white man? . . . In truth, I have never been able to discover that there was anything disgraceful in being a colored man. But I have found it inconvenient—in America. . . .

It was [in California] that I first ran up against the humiliations and persecutions that have to be faced by every person of colored blood, no matter what his brains, education or the integrity of his conduct. How many times have hotel keepers said to me, ''I know you, Williams, and I like you, and I would like nothing better than to have you stay here, but you will see we have Southern gentlemen in the house and they would object.''

Frankly, I can't understand what it is all about. I breathe like other people, eat like them—if you put me at a dinner table you can be reasonably sure that I won't use the ice cream fork for my salad; I think like other people. I guess the whole trouble must be that I don't look like them. They say it is a matter of race prejudice. But if it were prejudice a baby would have it, and you will never find it in a baby. It has to be inculcated on people. For one thing, I have noticed that this ''race prejudice'' is not to be found in people who are sure enough of their position to be able to defy it. . . .

Then, one day at Moore's Wonderland in Detroit, just for a lark I blacked my face and tried the song, ''Oh, I don't know, you're not so warm.'' Nobody was more surprised than I when it went like a house on fire. Then I began to find myself. By that time I had met George Walker, and we used to travel around the country together. I took to studying the dialect of the American negro, which to me was just as much a foreign dialect as that of the Italian. . . .

After [success at Koster & Bial's in New York] I went to Europe frequently, not only because I found kinder treatment there but in order to learn my trade. I used to go over every summer for a while and study pantomime from Pietro, the great pantomimist. He is the one artist from whom I can truthfully say that I have learned. He taught me

gesture, facial expression—without which I would ever have been able to do the poker game stunt that was so popular. And above all he taught me the value of poise, repose and pauses. He taught me that the pause after a gesture or a movement is frequently more important than the gesture itself, because it emphasizes the gesture. . . It was Pietro who taught me that the entire aim and object of art is to achieve naturalness. The more simple and real the manner of your walking or talking the more effective, and that is the purpose of art.

THE CIRCUS

"Friday I tasted life. It was a vast morsel," Emily Dickinson wrote to her sister. "A circus passed the house—I still feel the red in my mind though the drums are out."[1] In early May 1866 a caravan traveled through Amherst, Massachusetts, and on to towns along the Connecticut Valley. For Dickinson the show of the show—not the performance, but the parade and the brass band—was a rare treat. To Dickinson in the quiet college town, the circus brought excitement to a humdrum existence of seriousness, duty, and toil. Most of all, it conveyed a sense of movement and dynamism. Small caravans slowly wending their way across the country reached towns too small to support other professional companies. In the early nineteenth century the circus was the most complete amusement package available. In the one spectacle was mastery of the human body exhibited in daring feats and supremacy over the rarest of animals. Those who flocked to the circus thrilled to see man's control over wildness and anarchy as well as displays of the human body disciplined and brute creation tamed.

The modern circus emerged in the 1830s. Its roots lay in combining the exhibition of exotic beasts with displays of horsemanship and gymnastics. In the eighteenth century traveling menageries were judged to be educational and edifying, rather than merely frivolous dissipation. The respectable were drawn to the unusual of God's creation: caged wild cats, polar bears and porcupines, camels and zebras, buffalo and bears, or as much of a Noah's Ark as the noble educator could assemble. The great attraction of the "natural curiosities" was that they were living, not stuffed as in a dime museum. The first elephant appeared in 1796, the rhinoceros in 1826, the giraffe or "cameleopard" in 1837, and the hippopotamus or "blood-sweating behemoth" in the 1850s. However, showmen blurred the boundaries between enlightenment and entertainment. They soon added amusing acts demonstrating man's control over the animal kingdom. In 1798 William Pinchbeck announced to the people of Newburyport, Massachusetts, the astounding sight of a "Pig of Knowledge" who "reads print or writing, spells, tells the time of day, both the hours and minutes, by any persons watch in the company, the

date of the year, the day of the month."[2] The "Philosophical Fish," "Sapient Dog," and "Learned Goat" soon followed.

Hippodrama introduced from England staged astonishing acrobatic feats on horseback. Philip Astley, a former cavalry officer, pioneered the modern circus in suburban London in 1768. One of his rivals, John Bill Ricketts, brought exhibitions of trick riding to Philadelphia in 1793 and toured seaboard cities, performing in specially built wooden arenas or in the open air. Opposition to itinerant players remained strong in New England and the northern states. Equestrian performers were often grouped with "mountebanks," defined by Connecticut state legislature in 1798 as those who "exhibit tricks of tumbling, ropewalking or dancing, puppet shows or any uncommon feats of agility of the body for money." Saratoga Springs allowed a playhouse in the 1820s, but a law of 1836 gave power to the city trustees to restrict "caravans of living animals, or other natural or artificial curiosities, or shows, or exhibitions for money."[3] Elsewhere, particularly in New York State, the circus began to thrive. After an equestrian circus joined forces with a menagerie with a zebra, camels, and a pony-riding monkey in 1828, the arrangement soon became standard practice. In the 1830s the novel use of tents made traveling shows independent of rented barns for arenas. By 1835 the first small tent of 1826 had ballooned to a hundred and twenty thousand square feet, sufficient for five thousand spectators.

The parade to the campground provided a free show and the greatest advertisement. With the strident sound of the large brass band came the procession—fifty carriages and a hundred and fifty horses in Van Amburgh's on Broadway in 1846. By the 1860s horse-drawn vehicles encrusted with carved dragons, eagles, and rococo decorations and painted in gaudy colors were standard. The Great Egyptian Dragon Chariot of Crane and Company's Great Oriental Circus was drawn by ten camels in 1849, and Howes and Cushing's huge parade organ needed forty horses in 1857. The Buffalo *Courier* described the impact of the Great European Circus's "pageant" through the city's streets in 1868. "First came the immense band chariot . . . suggestive of wealth and splendor, bearing the golden statue of Alexander's famous horse Bucephalus, containing the silver cornet band, and drawn by a team of gaily-decked dromedaries from the desert of Saharah." Many other monstrous wagons followed, some in fantastic shapes, like the "fairy chariot" drawn by twelve small ponies and escorted by knights and their ladies. The "grand feature" of the long procession was the "colossal leonine car, bearing beautiful women, in the centre of which was a large living lion, uncaged and unchained, reposed in all his native majesty near his keeper."[4]

Within the next decade, the circus was transformed, particularly by improved management. Faster railroad travel eliminated loss-making stops; dou-

bling the performance rings expanded the program. Barnum's alliance with the master-organizer James A. Bailey in the late 1880s produced one of the famous combinations in a highly competitive business. Small family tented shows survived, especially in the rural south and west, but twenty large, highly capitalized enterprises traversing almost half the country dominated. By 1895 Ephraim, Lewis, and Peter Sells of Columbus, Ohio, a typically large circus, employed almost five hundred and traveled nearly fourteen thousand miles in thirty-two weeks. There were still a hundred circuses in 1903, but only a few of the "mammoth," "colossal" combinations aspired to continental coverage. The *Barnum and Bailey Greatest Show on Earth*, billed in the 1890s as "The World's Largest, Grandest, Best Amusement Institution," failed, was purchased by Ringling Brothers in 1907, and the shows merged in 1918. By then, the grand parade had proved too costly to organize for one-day visits and almost disappeared.

The Circus Debated

Throughout the century, evangelical Christians condemned the circus as an insidious and pernicious amusement that sapped the virtue of the republic's citizens. Insidious, because what appeared to be merely a novel display of skill enticed, excited, and deluded the innocent; pernicious, because it ensnared the young, the most vulnerable, into a thoughtless love of pleasure that led to vice. In response, the interdenominational agencies that flourished in the generation after the Revolution launched a campaign, indeed, a crusade, to inform children, with cautionary tales written in the colloquial language of mass-market fiction. Some narratives, like the American Sunday-School Union's *Slim Jack: or, The History of a Circus-Boy* (1847), depicted in mawkish detail the sad fate of a foolish acrobat betrayed and abandoned by a callous entrepreneur. Most, however, were simple dialogues between the innocent and the wise. In a Sunday-School Union pamphlet, the worthy Mr. Brown explained to his young sons why circus exhibitions were morally unsound.

The Circus (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, n.d. [1840s]).

Alfred and Silas Brown were brothers, and went to the same school. When they were coming home one day, they saw a man with a large parcel of papers under his arm, and in his hand he carried a pot of paste and a brush. The man stopped by a high fence, and put down the pot of paste and spread out his papers, just as the boys came near him. They stopped to look at these papers, and saw that there were a great many as large as a newspaper; but they were covered by bright red pictures, and all these pictures were men and horses. Some of the horses were running. Some seemed as if they were almost flying, for none of their feet were made to look as if they touched the ground; and the men were not riding as we are used to see them, but were standing

on the horses. Some were standing on one foot, and some were driving two horses and had one foot on each of them.

Alfred and Silas did not know what to make of these fine looking pictures. So Alfred, who was the oldest, said to the man, ''Will you please to tell me, sir, what this picture is about?''

By this time the man had put some paste on one of the sheets of paper, and was pasting it to the high fence where he had stopped.

''O yes, my little man,'' said he, ''to be sure I will tell you. We are going to have a fine show here in a few days. We shall have a great many horses, that will do almost anything they are told to do, and fine music, and many other pretty sights. Here,'' said he, ''take one of these papers and show it to all your school-mates, and tell them to save their money and come to the show. I cannot stop to talk to you about it now, but I belong to the circus, (for that is the name of the show,) and when you come there, I will tell you all you want to know about it.''

''O thank you, sir,'' said Alfred, taking the paper, ''I will ask my father to let me come;'' and, taking Silas by the hand, he started to go home.

''Stop, my little lad,'' said the man. ''If you think your father will not let you come, you had better not say anything to him about it; but you and little bub,'' (for so he called his brother Silas,) ''can come after school, and be sure to bring your money, and I will show you something worth seeing. And see that you show the paper to your school-mates.''

This was a wicked man. It is as wicked to persuade others to do wrong as to do it ourselves.

Off ran the little boys, and Alfred ran so fast he almost pulled Silas down, for his little legs were so short, he could scarcely keep up with him; so when they got home they were almost out of breath.

''O mother,'' said Alfred, ''such a kind man! and he says that if I will come there, he will show me all the fine things.''

''Not so fast, my son,'' said his mother. ''Stop and rest, and then begin slowly, and I shall know what you are talking about.''

''Where is the picture, Silas? Then look here, mother, see these fine horses.''

''I should think that man would fall down and hurt himself,'' said little Silas, pointing to a man in the picture, who was standing with only one foot on a horse who was running very fast.

Just at this time the door opened, and Mr. Brown came in. Both the boys ran to him.

''May we go, father, to the show?'' said Alfred. ''Come look at all the horses; they know how to do every thing.''

When Mr. Brown saw the picture, and heard his little boys talk about going to see the show, at first he felt sorry that he had heard anything about it; but afterwards he thought this was a good time to tell them what he thought of the circus. He knew that, as they should grow older, they would hear more about it; and if they did not know

what kind of places they are, where such amusements are found, they might desire to go and see for themselves. So their father spread the picture on a table, and told the little boys to bring chairs and sit down by him, and he would tell them something about the circus.

He said, ''I know little boys are very fond of horses, and it is very wonderful to see how much they can be taught. But whenever I think about it, I feel very sorry for the poor animals; for they have to be whipped very hard and treated very cruelly, before they can be taught all these things. This is not the only reason, however, why I am unwilling that you should go to the circus. The men who belong to it are generally idle and worthless people, who go about from place to place, and get their living by taking money of many persons who cannot afford to spend it so foolishly. Then there is a great deal of drinking and gambling about a circus; and I always think it a very sad thing for a village when the circus comes into it.

''Besides all this, it makes all the boys, who see it, want to do just as the men do; and some of them get so fond of seeing such shows, that as soon as they get a chance, they join themselves to a circus, and then there is no hope of their making useful men.

''When I was a little boy, there was such a show came to the place where I lived. My father talked to me as I have talked to you, and of course I did not go; but many of my school-mates went. After the circus had left, the boys tried to do as the circus men did, and one little boy tried to ride a horse while standing on his back. The old horse, who would have carried the little boy very safely if he had rode him in the usual way, did not know what to make of this new fashion of riding; for he had been brought up to good habits, and had never been in a circus. Soon he began to trot, and moved about so much, that the little boy, who did not know how to keep steady, fell off and broke his arm. He suffered a great deal of pain, and never tried to ride like the circus men again.

''So, my little boys,'' said Mr. Brown, ''I shall not take you to the circus, but in a short time there is to be a show of wild beasts; and then I will take you to see it, if we live.''

''Thank you, thank you, father,'' said Alfred, ''that will do a great deal better. Come, Silas, let us go and play.''

Mr. Brown's "show of wild beasts" had almost universal approval; *The Menagerie: A Reward for Good Children* (1835) explained the moral distinction between the "rational" display of wild animals and the "foolish" show of dancing puppets which merely frittered away God's time. A few children's authors, like "Fanny Fern," the pioneering journalist and feminist Sara Payson Willis Parton, openly defended the circus, while acknowledging its failings. More daringly, Parton hoped that commercial reality might transcend racial prejudice. As in all public entertainment before the Civil War, segregation was the norm. Some claimed that the circus transcended the usual social

barriers. "Everybody went—all classes, ages, colors and conditions," the New England humorist Hiram Fuller wrote in 1858 of the circus's visit to Newport, Rhode Island. "There were as many as five thousand people there, all mixed up with the most democratic indiscrimination—Fifth Avenue belles sitting on narrow boards with their dresses under their arms, alongside of Irish chambermaids and colored persons of all sizes and sexes."[5] However, it is more likely, as Fanny Fern suggests, that African Americans like "black Nanny" were allowed to sit in the sections reserved for whites only because they sat with their employers. In the 1830s the New York Zoological Institute had a prominent sign outside its amphitheater at 37 Bowery: "The proprietors wish it to be understood, that PEOPLE OF COLOR are *not permitted to enter*, EXCEPT WHEN IN ATTENDANCE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES."[6]

Fanny Fern [Sara Payson Willis Parton], *The Play-Day Book; or, New Stories for Little Folks* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1857), 45–49.

What a mob of boys! There's Bill Saunders, and Ned Hoyt, and Tom Fagin, and Lewis Coates, and John Harris; and, sure as the world, there's that little tomtit, Harry Horn, without a sign of a cap on, jumping up and down as if there were pins in his trowsers. What can be the matter, I wonder? Now they shout, ''Hurra—hurra!''—but then boys are always screaming hurra. I have done breaking my neck leaning out of the window to see what is the matter. I won't look at the little monkeys. There it goes again—''Hurra! hurra!'' One would think General Washington, Lafayette, or same other great person, was coming down street. Now they move to one side—ah, now I see what all the fuss is about! A great flaming red and yellow hand-bill is posted on the fence; and on it is written, ''Pat Smith's Circus! next Wednesday afternoon and evening.'' Circus! no wonder little Harry Horn forgot to put his hat on, and jumped up and down as if he were trying to jump out of his trowsers.

If there is anything that drives boys crazy, it is a circus. I should like to know why; I have a great mind to go to Pat Smith's Circus myself; just to find out; for I never was in a circus in my life. Yes, I will go, and I will take Nelly; she never was in a circus either. No, I won't; I will leave her at home with black Nanny. No, I won't; I will take black Nanny too; but then I am not sure Pat Smith allows colored people in his circus. Well, if he is such a senseless Pat as that, he may go without three twenty-five cent pieces, that's all, for Nanny likes a little fun as well as if her skin were whiter; and if Nanny can't come in, Nelly and I won't. But Nanny can; Pat is not such a fool. So, come along, Nanny; come along, Nelly; it don't matter what you wear. Walk a little faster, both of you; we must get a good seat, or we shall lose half the fun. Short people are apt to fare badly in a crowd. Here we are! This a circus! this round tent? How funny! Music inside; that's nice; I like music; so do Nelly and Nanny.

Here's your money, Mr. Pat Smith. Goodness! you don't mean that we have got to clamber up in those high, ricketty-looking seats, without any backs? Suppose we should fall through on the ground below? Suppose the seats should crack, and let all

these people down? I think we'll climb up to the highest seat, for in case they do break, I had rather be on the top of the pile than underneath it. That's it; here's a place for you, Nanny. Bless me, what a ''many people,'' as little Harry Horn says. Little babies, too, as I live;—well, I suppose their poor tired mothers wanted a little fun too; but the babies are better off than we, because they can have a drink of milk whenever they are thirsty. Ah, I was a little too fast there, for Pat Smith has provided lemonade, and here comes a man with a pailful. Circus lemonade!—no, I thank you; it may be very good, but I prefer taking your word for it.

How the people flock in! What's that coming in at yonder door? Nanny! Nelly!—look! Is it a small house painted slate-color? No—it is an elephant—a live elephant. What a monster! what great flapping ears! what huge paws! and what a rat-ty looking tail! I don't like his tail; but his trunk is superb. I am afraid he has had a deal of whipping to make him behave so well. How he could make us all fly, if he chose; what mince-meat he could make of those little fat babies yonder. I am glad he don't want to; they are too pretty to eat. What are they going to do with him, I wonder? It can't be that they mean to make him walk up that steep pair of stairs. Yes—see him! Would you believe such a great monster could do it so gracefully? He lifts his paws as gently as a kitten. Now that's worth seeing; but how in the world are they going to get him down, now that he has reached the top? See—he is going to back down; not one false step does he make; now he has reached the bottom. Clever old monster! It seems a shame to make such a great, grand-looking, kingly creature, perform such dancing-master tricks. Now his master lies flat on his back on the ground, and the old elephant is going to walk over him. Suppose he should set that great paw of his on his master's stomach, and crush him as flat as a pancake? No; see how carefully he steps over him with those big legs; never so much as touching his gay scarlet-and-white tunic. Splendid old fellow, to have so much strength, and yet never use it to the harm of those who torment him with all this nonsense. How I should like to see you in your native jungles, old elephant, with all your baby elephants; your little big babies, old fellow. There he goes. I am glad they have done with him. It makes me sad to see him. Good-bye, old Samson.

What now? a lady on horseback, Mr. Pat Smith's wife; she sets her horse very well, but that's nothing remarkable; I can set a horse as well as that myself; but I couldn't make a leap on her back over that five-barred gate—mercy, no—he will break her neck, I know he will; I am afraid Mr. Pat Smith wants a second wife. Oh, see, the horse has come down safe with her on the other side of the gate. Now she is going to try it again; what a woman that is! I hope Mr. Pat Smith gives her half the money that he takes this hot night, for I am sure she has earned it; but wives don't always get what they earn, and I dare say Mrs. Pat Smith don't.

Now here comes a parcel of fellows in white tights, tight as their skin, tumbling head over heels, up side down, standing on each others' heads, and cutting up untold and untellable capers. I must say their strong limbs are quite beautiful, just as God

intended limbs should grow, just as I hope yours will grow, one of these days, though I think it may be done without your being a circus tumbler. See how nimble they are, and how like eels they twist and squirm about, leaping on each others' shoulders like squirrels, leaping down again, running up tall poles and sitting on the top, and playing there with half a dozen balls at once, which are tossed up at them from below. It is really quite wonderful, and yet I can't help thinking had they taken as much pains to learn something really useful, as they have to learn to be funny, how much good they might do; for after all, a monkey, or a squirrel, or all ourang-outang could do all that quite as well as a man, who is so much superior to them, quite as gracefully, and without any teaching, too. But, bless me, a circus is no place to think, and yet I wish those men's heads were as well trained as their heels; if you listen you will find out they are not; just hear those stupid jokes they are making, how badly they pronounce, how ungrammatically they express themselves, and hear—oh, no—*don't* hear that! what a pity they should say anything *indelicate* before ladies and pure little children. *Now* I know why fathers and mothers do not like their little boys and girls to go to the circus. Mr. Pat Smith, Mr. Pat Smith, you must leave off those stupid bad jokes, if you want to draw ladies and little children.

I wish somebody would get up a *good* circus without these faults. I cannot think so badly of the people as to believe that they would like it less if it were purified. I think it might be made a very pleasant and harmless amusement for little children, who seem to want to go so much, and who have often felt so badly because their parents were not willing. Perhaps there are such good circuses, that I may not have heard of. I like good schools, I like study, but I should like to write over every schoolroom door—"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy!"

A generation later, the circus had acquired more respectability. In 1883, Richard Kyle Fox, publisher of the sensationalist *National Police Gazette*, issued a small booklet by the acrobat Alfred Trumble. Trumble described the lives of the circus performers with their "spangled" or glittering, sequined costumes, but Fox embellished the plain narrative with characteristically lurid *Gazette* engravings of "show girls" in skimpy dresses—"Favorites of the Footlights"—and advertisements for such Fox publications as *Folly's Queens; or, Women whose Loves have ruled the World*, and *The Female Sharpers of New York*, all "handsomely illustrated." Indeed, semipornographic views of "leg-show" performers on horseback or trapeze in short skirt and tights undermined Trumble's justifications.

[Alfred T. Trumble,] *A Spangled World; or, Life with the Circus* (New York: Richard Fox, proprietor *Police Gazette*, 1883), 8, 21, 83.

I always pity the people who have so much to say against the circus. What poor creatures they are to look at, with their skinny, solemn faces and their rusty black

suits! I believe the cause of their hatred of the circus may be found in their envy of the clown. He never looks dismal, he don't dress in rusty black, and who ever yet saw a clown who was not fat enough to kill?

The beauty of the circus is that everyone can understand it, a deaf and dumb boy can enjoy it, and a blind man could revel in the music and laugh at the clown's jokes. Youth, and age, irrespective of nationality, can feast upon the splendors of the sawdust circles and understand it all. If you go to the play and don't understand what the actors are saying you have but a poor time of it. But what does it matter what they say at the circus, as long as they do only half the things they promise on the bills. . . .

Now let us look at the people who constitute the circus.

The chief of these, as the reader will admit, are the riders. Who has not felt his heart stop beating as these gorgeous apparitions burst upon him from the mysterious recesses of the dressing-room? What a dream they were! Velvets, tinsel, tarletan skirts, pink tights, gold braid, feathers and spangles, flying through the air like gigantic birds of paradise. . . .

The circus is a great humanizer. Its popularity is due chiefly to the fact that everyone can understand it, and it rouses in every one a sympathy of sentiments which levels the barriers fortune and station set up. The millionaire gets no more for his money than the man who sweeps the crossing for him, at the circus. He can only see, hear and enjoy, and those prerogatives nature and not fortune confers on man.

Look at the motley throng which makes up the audience of a circus. At the theatre you see not only silks and laces and diamonds, but here flannel shirt jostles broadcloth coat, and calico wrapper brushes sealskin; here diamonds gleam beside brass, and ostrich plumes quiver next to Bowery ribbons at five cents a yard. Artisan and banker, scullion and mistress, make up the swarm who turn out when the circus comes to town.

All this, as much as the performances themselves, lend interest to the show. If the act in the ring is dull, one can study one's neighbors, and be interesting in spite of the clown's antediluvian jokes and the ringmaster's familiar replies and apostrophes. This was never better shown than in the success the circus meets with in foreign countries. Even a Frenchman will laugh at the, to him, incomprehensible witticisms of an American clown. He knows it is the clown's business to be funny and takes it for granted that he is so. It is well for the clown, sometimes, that he does take it for granted, perhaps.

The Early Circus

On May 28, 1835, Nathaniel Hawthorne noted his impressions of the circus performance he had seen in Salem and used it as the basis for his brief essay in the *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* in April 1836. Perhaps the accent on tradition gave the skills greater legitimacy.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Hawthorne's Lost Notebook, 1835–1841*, ed. Barbara S. Mouffe (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), 3.

The Early Circus

The Circus—A dancing horse, keeping excellent time to the music, with all four feet. Mr Dakin says, that two horses, who had learned to dance, dropt down dead during their performance. The physical exertion seems very moderate; it must be the mental labor that kills them—The Clown in his dress of motley, making fun of everything—Mr. Merryman—the most antique character, I suppose, now existing; just the same, probably, that he used to be five hundred years ago; and perhaps playing-off many of the identical jokes that all those successive generations have roared at.—A fellow who kept up several balls in the air at once; and also several knives;—this, too, is a feat of great antiquity, practised by the Saxon gleemen.—Excellent horsemanship,—one rider with a boy on his shoulders; another man got into a sack, and after riding a few minutes, behold a woman emerged from the sack—Feats of strength, by a young fellow of no great bulk, but very solid muscle; lifting a table and a boy on it, with his teeth; sustaining an anvil on his breast, whereon another man smote with a sledge-hammer; laying out horizontally, with his feet against a stout pole, high up in the air, and letting a boy walk out on his back. The fellow seemed awkward in deportment, and made a very quick and bashful bob of his head, by way of bow to the spectators—A small white dog, of divers accomplishments—Vaulting and tumbling—one fellow threw fourteen somersets in succession.

In the summer of 1838 Hawthorne took a two-month vacation in the Berkshire hills in western Massachusetts. During his extended stay in North Adams, he relaxed with his new-found friend, Orrin Smith, a local widower. There he met an agent making advance preparations for a menagerie. The Zoological Institute had pooled the resources of thirteen itinerant companies in 1835, but the cartel soon failed in the depression of 1837. June, Titus, Angevine and Company, one of the institute's former subdivisions, arrived in Worcester on August 17 and spent a few days in Springfield and Chicopee. It had a choice of directions to North Adams: to go north along the Connecticut Valley toward Deerfield and Greenfield and then west along the Mohawk Trail via Charlemont, or to cross the Berkshires to Pittsfield and travel through Cheshire. This was good territory for traveling shows. It was in West Springfield in 1836 that Barnum began his six-month tour with his juggler Signor Vivalla as part of Aaron Turner's equestrian Old Columbian Circus. Hawthorne was intrigued by the agent's rude energy, and, as was his custom, made quick notes on August 18, 1838.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks*, ed. Claude M. Simpson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), 117–18.

One of the proprietors or superintendents of a Caravan of Animals:—a large, portly-paunched, dark-complexioned, brandy burnt, heavy-faced man of about fifty; with a diminutive nose in proportion to the size of his face—thick, heavy lips;—nevertheless the air of a man who has seen much, and derived such experience as was for his

purpose. Also, the air of a man not in subordinate station, though vulgar and coarse. He arrived in a wagon with a handsome span of grey horses; and ordered dinner. He had left his Caravan at Worcester, and came from thence, and over the mountain hither, to settle stopping-places for the caravan. His nearest to this, I believe, was at Charlemont,—the penultimate at Greenfield. In stopping at such a village as this, they do not expect much profit, if any; but would be content to pay their travelling expenses, and gather gain at larger places. In this village, it seems, the selectmen had resolved not to license any public exhibition of the kind; and it was interesting to attend to the consultations whether it were feasible to overcome their objections, and what might be the best means. Orrin and the chance passers-by took part in the discussion:—the scruple is, that the factory girls &c having ready money by them, spend it for these nonsenses, quitting their work;—whereas, were it a mere farming town, the Caravan would take little in proportion to their spendings. The opinion was generally, that the license could not be obtained;—and the portly man's face grew darker and downcast at the prospect; and he took out a travelling map, and looked it carefully over to discover some other station. This is somewhat like the planning of the route of an army. It was finally resolved to enlist the influence of a brother-in-law of the head selectman, and to try to gain his consent;—whereupon the caravan-man and the brother-in-law (who, being a tavern-keeper, was to divide the custom of the caravan-people with our house) went to make the attempt;—the caravan man stalking along with stiff awkward bulk and stature, yet preserving a respectability withal, though with somewhat of the blackguard. Before he went he offered a wager of ''a drink of rum to a chaw of tobacco'' that he did not get in. When he came back, there was a flush on his face and a sparkle in his eye that did not look like failure; but I know not what was the result. He took a glass of wine with the brother-in-law—a grave, thin, frosty-haired, shrewd-looking, yeoman in his shirt-sleeves—then ordered his horses, paid his bill, and rode off, accompanied still by the said yeoman, perhaps to get the permission of the other two selectmen. If he does not get a license here, he will try at Cheshire.

Two weeks later, on September 4, 1838, Hawthorne wrote about the show day in North Adams. The star attraction of June, Titus, Angevine, and Company was the elephant Siam. The menagerie added human intervention to enliven the traditional caged displays in the tent. Isaac Van Amburgh first entered the lions' cage in 1834 and astounded spectators by putting his head in the beast's open mouth. The novelty rapidly became established tradition and a bridge to other feats of human daring; thereafter, if posters displayed wild cats, almost always it was with the brave keeper in the cage.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks*, ed. Claude M. Simpson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), 140–41.

This day, an exhibition of animals in the vicinity of the village—under a pavillion of sailcloth, the floor being the natural grass, with here and there a rock partially protrud-

ing. A pleasant, mild shade; a strip of sunshine, or a spot of glimmering brightness in some parts. Crowded—row above row of women, on an amphitheater of seats, on one side. In an inner pavilion, an exhibition of anacondas, four, which the showman took one by one from a large box, under some blankets, and hung round his shoulders. They seemed almost torpid when first taken out; but gradually began to assume life, to extend, to contract; to twine and writhe about his neck and person, thrusting out their tongues, and erecting their heads. Their weights were as much as he could well bear; and they hung down almost to the ground, when not contorted; big round as a mans thigh—almost. Spotted and richly variegated. Then he thrust them into the box again, their heads emerging, and writhing forth—which he thrust back again. He gave a descriptive and historical account of them, and some fanciful and jocose &c. A man put his arm and head into the lion's mouth,—all the spectators looking on, so attentively that a breath could not be heard. That was impressive—its effect on a thousand people, more than the thing itself.

In the evening, the caravan people at our house, talking of their troubles in coming over the mountain, the overturn of a cage containing two leopards and a hyena. They are a rough, ignorant set of men, apparently incapable of taking any particular enjoyment from the life of variety and adventure which they lead. There, was the man who put his head in the lion's mouth, and, I suppose, the man whom the anaconda's twined about, talking about their suppers, and blustering for hot meat, and calling for something to drink, without anything of the wild dignity of men familiar with the *nobility of nature*.

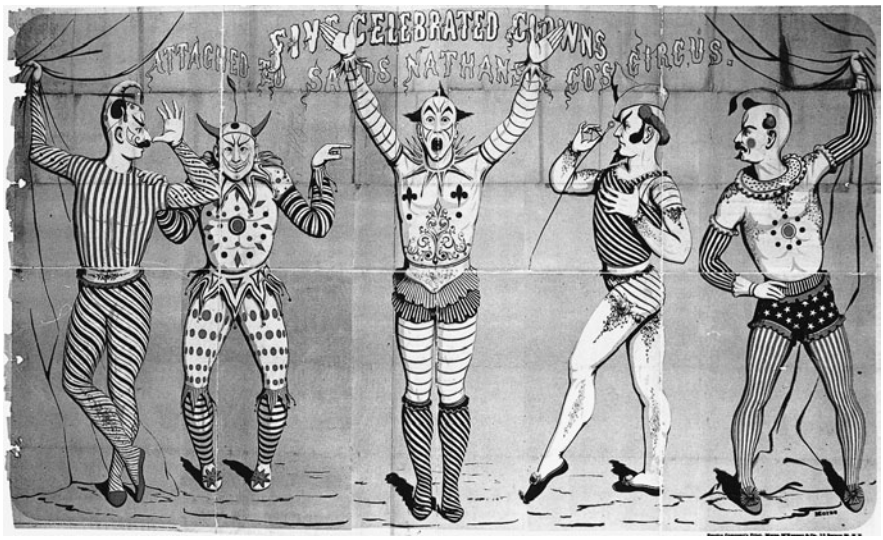
A character of a desperate young man, who employs high courage and strong faculties in these sort of dangers, and wastes his talents in wild riot, addressing the audience as a snake man—keeping the ring while the monkey rides the poney—singing negro and other songs.

The country boors were continually getting within the barriers and venturing too near the cages. The great lion lay with his four paws extended, and a calm, majestic, but awful countenance. He looked on the people as if he had seen many such concourses. The hyaena was the most ugly and dangerous looking beast, full of spite, and on ill terms with all nature—looking a good deal like a hog with the devil in him. The ridge of hair along his back bristling. He was in the cage with a leopard and a panther; and the latter seemed continually on the point of laying his claw upon the hyaena, who snarled, and showed his teeth. It is strange to see, though, how these wild beasts acknowledge and practise a degree of mutual forbearance, and of obedience to man—with their wild nature yet in them. The great white bear seemed in distress from the heat, moving his head and body in a strange fantastic way—and eagerly swilling water when given it. He was thin and lank.

The caravan men were so sleepy, Orrin says, that he could hardly wake them in the morning. They turned over on their faces to shun him.

Coming out of the caravan, there were the mountains, in the quiet sunset; and many men drunk, swearing and fighting. Shanties with liquor for sale.

The elephant lodged in our barn.



The combined circus-menagerie of J. J. Nathans and Richard Sands and partners publicized its five clowns in a large lithographed poster, eleven feet by nine, in 1856. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Henry David Thoreau thrilled at the wildness of the animals exhibited in menageries. He gave a lyrical description of the canvas "pagoda in perfection," with its lingering smell of trampled grass and cigar smoke, that seemed mysterious, graceful, exotic, Oriental.[7] On August 1, 1851, he described his second visit in two months to the traveling show. His chief complaint was its overtly commercial intent.

Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. 2., *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Bradford Torrey (1906; New York: AMS Press, 1968), 367–68, 369.

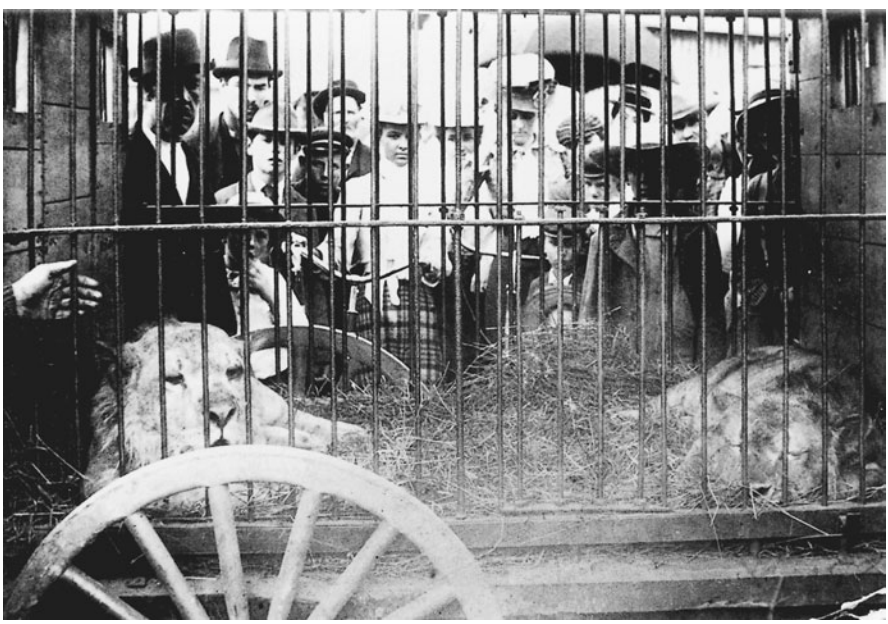
I went to a menagerie the other day, advertised by a flaming show-bill as big as a barn-door. The proprietors had taken wonderful pains to collect rare and interesting animals from all parts of the world, and then placed by them a few stupid and ignorant fellows, coachmen or stablers, who knew little or nothing about the animals and were unwilling even to communicate the little they knew. You catch a rare creature, interesting to all mankind, and then place the first biped that comes along, with but a grain more reason in him, to exhibit and describe the former. . . . Not a cage was labelled. There was nobody to tell us how or where the animals were caught, or what they were. . . . I go not there to see a man hug a lion or fondle a tiger, but to learn how he is related to the wild beast. . . . Let it be a travelling zoölogical garden, with a travelling professor to accompany it. At present, foolishly, the professor goes alone with his poor painted illustrations of animals, while the menagerie takes another road, without its professor,—only its keepers, stupid coachmen. . . The present institution is imper-

fect precisely because its object is to enrich Van Amburgh & Co., and their low aim unfits them for rendering any more valuable service.

The *Knickerbocker*, the prestigious New York literary magazine, published the first American essay on the circus in 1839. It depicted a village accustomed to itinerants, but so excited by the circus's annual visit that the minister's warnings are ignored. The acts described—the youth's transformation into the lady rider, and the comic Tailor's Ride to Brentford—were standard English tradition. Unusually, the writer draws attention to the African Americans segregated among the spectators. The usual custom in the North was to put blacks in a separate "enclosure"; in the South they were often excluded entirely.

"The Circus," *Knickerbocker* 13 (January 1839): 68–69, 70, 72, 74–76.

A travelling caravan is an integral portion of the great institute in the metropolis. When the summer comes, it is broken up into parts, which are dispersed in every section of the country, that the imprisoned beasts may have the benefit of pure air. These consist, for the most part, of a lion, a tiger, a black bear, a camel, a wild cat, a hyena, some torpid snakes, coiled up in a box, and in a separate apartment a pan-



For patrons of Clyde Wixom's circus in the 1890s, one of the chief attractions was the display of caged exotic animals in the sideshow. Collections of the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village.

orama, and a man who ''sings Jim Crow.'' This latter is the most noxious beast of the whole clan. Besides these, a great number of monkeys, apes, and ring-tailed baboons are shut up in a community. These be capital fellows, full of spirits, which go the whole length of their ropes, and are better worth seeing, the spectators themselves being judges, than all the tigers, zebras, and hump-back camels, put together. Among themselves, they are ''hale fellows,'' chattering and grinning, jibing, and cracking their jokes, as if in some forest of Africa, save when a bystander rolls in an ''apple of discord,'' or a cake, and then the big ones flog the small ones unmercifully; and herein consists the kernel of the joke. A Shetland pony goes round and round in a circle, surmounted by a jocko in scarlet uniform, who proves himself an indomitable horseman. He leaps on and off, handles the reins with address, and cracks his whip like a Jehu. Sometimes a small African elephant is made to kneel down, and receive a tower on his shoulders. Those of the company who desire to ride, are requested to step forward, ''ladies first, gentlemen after-*wards*.'' After a deal of hesitation, a servant-maid gathers courage, and simpering and dimpling, ambles into the arena. Her the showman politely assists to ascend. Another follows, and another, until all the seats are taken up. Then the beast moves once around, with his slow and heavy tramp, the *ladies* descend from their airy height, and are able to go home and say that they have ''ridden on the elephant.'' Last of all, a negro is encouraged to mount the animal's bare back, and broadly grinning, is looking down upon the crowd below, when the latter, being privy to a joke, gives a violent shrug, and hurls him, as from a terrific precipice, to the ground. . . .

The menagerie is a very popular entertainment, unexceptionable on the score of morals, and visited by the ''most straitest sects'' of the people. . . .

It is a season of still deeper excitement, in such a retired country village, when once a year, after several days' heralding, a train of great red wagons is seen approaching, marked in large letters, CIRCUS, 1, 2, 3, 4, and so on. . . . A discussion waxes warm among the graver part of the community, about the lawfulness of these amusements. Some of the young are troubled with doubts. The old people hesitate, demur, and at last give their consent. They have been young once themselves—such opportunities do not occur everyday. Indeed, it would be very difficult for anyone to demur, after reading the ''bill of fare,'' a great blanket sheet, full of wood cuts and pictures; horses on the full run, and men bent into all possible shapes and contortions. ''Unrivalled Attraction! Grand entrée. Four-and-twenty Arabian horses. Celebrated equestrian Mr. Burke. Feats in the ring. Grand leap. Cups and ball. The entertainments to conclude with the laughable farce of Billy Button, or the Hunted Tailor.'' . . .

The sun is just resting on the borders of the horizon, and making the summer evening lovely, when the whole equestrian *corps*, a signal being given, sally forth and wind through the grass-skirted lanes of the village. A band of music goes before, drawn in a chariot by four dappled horses. The notes of the bugle floating exquisitely on the tranquil air, fill the rustic bosom with enthusiasm. The equestrians follow in gorgeous, spangled dresses, the clown standing up on one leg, with a straw in his

mouth, and giving a foretaste of those facetious inanities which he will exhibit at even. Just at dusk, they return to the pavilion. A motley crowd rushes hurriedly through the streets. The minister of the parish looks out from his window, and weeps. He is a good man, and God will shelter his little flock from harm. The scrupulous and the wavering are now decided. Those who but yesterday said, crabbedly, that they had ''no time, nor money nother, for such wild doings,'' bustle off, ''just to see what's going on.'' Many persons of approved gravity attend, who ''suld have known better.'' To the negro population, the occasion is a heyday and holiday. The Pompeys are there, and the Catos are there, and the noble lineage of the Caesars. Thus all the population are collected beneath the great tent. . . .

The area of the enclosure is divided into the ring, pit, and boxes. A circular wooden frame-work depends [hangs down] in the centre, containing a great many tarnished lamps, and magniloquently called a chandelier. . . .

Are there any in the whole area who will experience more genuine satisfaction, than the descendants of Ham? They are huddled together in one corner, dark, cloud-like, a distinct people. How will smiles and pleasantry be diffused over their features, like light bursting from the darkness! How will the whites of those eyes be uprolled in extacy, those even teeth glisten like ivory, and laughter break forth from the bottom of their souls, every laugh being worth a dollar! . . . It is high time that the performances commenced. ''Music! music!'' shout the crowd; and the orchestra without more ado plays a national air. Another piece is performed, and the tramping of horses is heard without. . . .

Tramp, tramp, tramp! There they come. Observe the grand entrée, by four-and-twenty Arabian horses, while the rustic mother claps her infant to her breast, scared by these terrible sports. At the first irruption of the cavalcade, the audience are bewildered with the general splendor of the scene. The horses, beautifully marked and caparisoned, are obedient to the slightest will of the rider, and yet by their proud looks and haughty bearing, seem conscious of their lineage; while the equestrians vie with each other in rich costume, and their plumes dropping softly over their painted faces, make them as bright as Lucifer, in the eyes of the crowd. They ride gracefully, displaying to advantage their elastic forms, swollen into full proportion by exercise and training. As soon as the audience is sufficiently recovered to particularize the different members of the troop, they are attracted by the grotesque behaviour of the clown, who has got upon his horse the wrong way, and sits preposterously facing the tail. In this manner he slips on and off, encouraged with immense laughter. Next the remarks go round, and everyone praises to his neighbor the remarkable lightness and agility of a juvenile equestrian. He has not yet completed his eleventh summer, and not a horseman in the troop can vie with him in daring. The ladies who adorn the dress circle, regard him with smiles and approbation. *O! pulchrum puerum!* What a fair boy! How his ringlets flutter over his brow, in beautiful dishevelment, fanned by the wanton breeze. They could almost pluck him from his flying steed, and arrest his course with kisses. So light and agile is he, that he appears not human, but, as he flies round

the ring with a daring rapidity, and his snow-white trowsers and gemmed vest mingle their colors, and become indistinct, he seems like an apple-blossom floating on the air. But look! look! What the devil is that fellow at, disrobing himself? He has kicked himself out of his pantaloons, and thrown away his coat, his horse flying all the while. ''Angels and ministers of grace defend us!'' he is plucking off his very—shirt! Nay, nay, do not be so alarmed, nor turn away your heads, ye fair ones, timidly blushing. Look again, and behold a metamorphosis more wonderful than any in Ovid; for lo! he pursues his swift career in the flowing robes of a woman! And now the pony is to perform a no less wonderful exploit, and leap through a balloon on fire. . . .

The second part of the diversions is a fescennine [scurrilous] dialogue, made up of alternate strokes of rude raillery, interspersed with songs and merriment, affording as keen a relish as the best Attic salt. . . .

Last of all, comes BILLY BUTTON, OR THE HUNTED TAILOR. I forget the plot of this piece, exactly, which is yearly enacted with much acceptation in every considerable village in the country. There are some very good points about it, that never come amiss to a rural audience, as when the perverse pony shakes off the cabbaging [thieving] tailor from his back, not allowing him to mount, or, dangerously acting on the offensive, chases him around the ring. And now the entertainments are about to conclude, let us indulge a wish that the ladies who have been seated near the crevices in the awning, may not catch their death a-cold, and that no evil whatever may result from the occasion. The clown bounces into the arena with a bow; doffs his harlequin aspect, and assumes the serious air of an every-day man. ''Ladies and gentlemen, the entertainments of the evening are concluded. We thank you for your polite attendance.'' In a twinkling the canvass is rent down over your heads, the lights are extinguished, and while the equestrians are already preparing to depart to the next village, the motley assemblage moves homeward through the dark night, yelping like savages.

Dan Rice, the most famous clown at midcentury, came annually to Brooklyn's Fulton Street campground. An anonymous reporter, most probably Walt Whitman, a prolific writer of brief essays about city life, saw his show of riders, acrobats, and comics in 1856 on either August 20 or 21. For the essayist, the circus typified the nation's youthful and physical vitality.

[Walt Whitman], "The Circus," *Life Illustrated* (August 30, 1856), in *New York Dissected: A Sheaf of Recently Discovered Newspaper Articles by the Author of Leaves of Grass*, ed. Emory Holloway and Ralph Adimari (New York: R. R. Wilson, 1936), 193–96.

To witness the feats of the Ring is, to a very large proportion of our people, the only public amusement which breaks the monotony of the year. The Circus is a national institution. Though originating elsewhere, and in ages long previous to the beginning of History, it has here reached a perfection attained nowhere else. . . . Doubtless, some of the funny things we saw Mr. Dan Rice doing in his tent in Brooklyn

last week, have amused young humanity for a hundred years. Nothing is so tenacious of life as a joke.

Yes—we spent an evening perched on one of the excruciatingly narrow boards of Mr. Dan Rice's big tent, and we must avow that we were entertained exceedingly, and that we saw nothing and heard nothing calculated to do harm to any human being. Once or twice there was perhaps an approach to a double entendre on the part of the clown, which should have been avoided. It may have been unintentional, however. The manager of such an establishment, which amuses a million persons a year, should regard himself somewhat in the light of a public instructor. He should consider that seven-tenths of his audience are *boys*, upon all of whom his performances produce a thrilling effect, and who will be likely to catch a moral tone, as well as the ingenious tricks, of the Ring. As a general rule, the clown's jokes and the master's grandiloquent speeches are extremely virtuous and intensely patriotic—which makes it all the more desirable that the faintest appearance of indecency should be absolutely forbidden. The presence of ladies (in thousands) has tended no doubt to the purification of the circus. If clergymen—in country places—would make a point of attending the performances occasionally, it would have an excellent effect upon the performers, upon the audiences, and upon themselves. . . .

There is no use in decrying the circus. Even if it were the bad thing which some narrow good people think it is, it could not be put down. It is exactly suited to the place it fills. Residing in Brooklyn near where Dan Rice pitched his mighty tent, we had an opportunity of observing the intense interest which is awakened, and the intense delight which the performances gave. A week before its arrival, the fences broke out with bills announcing the coming of the "Great Show." From that day young Brooklyn was agog. On the evening when we formed one of a compressed mass of human beings melting under the tent, there was not a foot of space vacant. Seven thousand persons were present. They were seated in great, ascending circles around the ring—a stilled whirlpool of human faces. The mere seating of this great concourse was a moral lesson. The quiet, easy way in which the regulations were enforced, the ready acquiescence of nearly every one in those regulations, the summary but passionless ejectment of any boy or youth who refused to observe them, the care taken of the ladies, the perfect order that prevailed everywhere, the universal *right feeling* of the audience, the manly civility of the attendants, were all admirable to witness. No policemen were necessary, though a few were present. All were effected by the three or four employees of the circus.

The performers, we have said above, were unexceptionable. But they were more than that—they were of remarkable excellence. Dan Rice, as a clown, is not equal to his reputation; his jokes were not of extra quality, and he pronounces the English language in a "stewen-jew-ous" manner. But the sight of such beautiful and sagacious horses as he has, is worth the time it costs. His riders, too, and strong men, and dancers, are all perfect in their several ways, and afford a lively evidence of what *practice* will enable men to do. It can do no harm to boys to see a set of limbs

displaying all their agility. It is pity, we admit, that the education of any man should be confined to his brain. But if we do not scruple to let children see men, and go to school to men who have no other than a brain development, let us not refuse occasionally to let them attend the evening school of these wonderfully leg-developed individuals. A circus performer is the other half of a college-professor. The perfect man has more than the professor's brains and a good deal of the performer's legs.

If, therefore, this circus of Mr. Dan Rice is a fair specimen of the circuses going about the country, we conclude that the circus is, to say the least, not a bad thing. It might be better. It ought to be scrupulously decent. The slightest looking down toward impropriety should be promptly hissed down. But on the whole we are glad we went, glad to see a circus in Brooklyn to go to, and glad that the circus is an established institution of the country. Something very good may come of it, by-and-by.

Silas Wheeler managed a medium-sized circus based in Boston in the 1860s. It probably carried a standard hundred-foot-diameter tent capable of seating a thousand and had a dozen canvasmen to erect it promptly. One of its key attractions was the Great Polka Horse Keil. There were probably five riders, notably Mme. Louise Tournaire and her daughter Josephine, the "fairy star." Other performers were four acrobats, including Mlle. Jeanette Ellsler on the tightrope and the Brothers Snow, Nat Austin and another clown, and perhaps three musicians in Prof. Silloway's Cornet Band. Wheeler charged a fee of two hundred dollars for candy stand concessions, and four hundred for sideshows whose chief exhibits in 1863 were Hiram and Barney Davis, the Wild Men of Borneo. The main expenses were wages, hotels and stables, printing and bill-posting. Perhaps because it had no menagerie that year, it traveled quite rapidly—about twenty miles a day, usually overnight—during the six-month tour of northern New England and the Maritimes. Some details of the Wheeler circus's itinerary are missing.

Copeland MacAllister, *Uncle Gus and the Circus: The Circus Activities of Augustine Constant from 1850 to 1871* (Framingham, Mass.: n.p., 1984), 12.

ITINERARY OF S.O. WHEELER'S GREAT INTERNATIONAL CIRCUS 1863

Date		Town	Miles
April	20	Cambridgeport, Mass.	
	21	Waltham	14
	22	Roxbury	15
	23	South Boston	4
	24	East Boston	5
	25	Chelsea	2
Sunday			
	27	Weymouth Landing	15

	28	East Abington	9
	29	North Bridgewater	5
	30	South Bridgewater	9
May	1	Taunton	9
	2	New Bedford	20
Sunday			
	4	Newport, R.I.	25
	5	Fall River, Mass.	18
	6	Pawtucket, R.I.	20
	7	Providence	5
	8	Providence	
	9	Phenix	10
Sunday			
	11	Woonsocket	24
	12	Milford, Mass.	12
	13	Worcester	19
	14	Natick	25
	15	Charlestown	19
	16	Lynn	8
Sunday			
	18	Salem	4
	19	Lawrence	19
	20	Lowell	10
	21	Lowell	
	22	Nashua, N.H.	12
	23	Manchester	15
Sunday			
	25	Haverhill, Mass.	25
	* *		
	28	Portsmouth, N.H.	
	29	Exeter	11
	30	Dover	18
Sunday			
June	1	Saco, Me.	35
	2	Portland	16
	3	Portland	
	4	Gray Corners	15
	5	Lewiston Falls	15
	6	Augusta	30
Sunday			
	8	Gardiner	8
	* *		

	17	Bangor	
	18	Bangor	
	* *		
	24	Eastport	
	25	Calais	25
	26	Journey to Canada: in St.John's, New Brunswick on July 14	
August	26	Gorham, N.H.	
	27	Lancaster	27
	28	Littleton	20
	* *		
Sept.	1	Plymouth	
	2	Laconia	24
	3	Franklin	12
	4	Concord	18
	5	Hillsborough	21
Sunday			
	7	Newport	28
	8	Lebanon	24
	9	Cornish Bridge	15
	10	Claremont	10
	11	Walpole	22
	12	Keene	15
Sunday			
	14	Brattleboro, Vt.	16
	15	Greenfield, Mass.	20
	16	Northampton	19
	17	Holyoake	10
	19	Springfield	
Sunday			
	* *		
	25	Athol	
	26	Winchendon	14
Sunday			
	30	Fitchburg	
	* *		
Oct.	13	South Danvers	
	14	Gloucester	15
	15	Marblehead	20
	16	Lynn	7
	17	East Boston	9

Sunday		
19	Charlestown	2
20–24	Boston Fairgrounds	2
	end of season	

Big Business

William Cameron Coup was the managerial genius of the modern circus. After joining the circus in Indiana as a teenager, he supervised sideshows in the south and midwest for more than twenty years before joining Barnum and Dan Castello. "P. T. Barnum's Museum, Menagerie and Circus, International Zoological Garden, Polytechnic Institute and Hippodrome" was organized in 1871. His greatest achievement, possibly suggested by Barnum, was converting the traditional horse-drawn wagon show to railroad cars in 1872. He exploited the new network of railroads and planned schedules across half the continent, bypassing towns now too small to cover the costs of performing. A moving army of thirty wagons mounted on railroad flatcars, supported by an advertising party of advance men and bill posters scouting ahead, traveled a hundred miles a day, and gave three three-hour performances a day in one huge tent with two show rings, and subsidiary sideshow tents. The Barnum circus partners introduced the second ring, and later the third ring, and made the show much more of an elaborate spectacle. Electric arc lights illuminated nighttime performances. The circus under the Barnum partners became synonymous with aggressive advertising: the half-page woodcut in newspapers in the 1830s, revolutionary at the time, was dwarfed by vast color posters—an 1882 hundred-sheet bill, twelve feet by ninety-six feet, was the biggest single picture ever printed.

After Coup's death in 1895, his recollections, recorded in the early 1890s, were rewritten by Forrest Crissey as anecdotal reminiscences depicting the golden age of the modern circus.

W. C. Coup, *Sawdust and Spangles: Stories and Secrets of the Circus* (Chicago: H. S. Stone, 1901), 59–60, 61, 64, 68–69, 63, 104, 105, 106–7, 107–8, 110, 124, 129, 130, 132, 133–34, 135, 136–38.

It requires several months of hard labor to prepare any show for the road, even those already organized, for, as a rule, all shows, "lay off" during the winter. . . . The manager then decides on his route for the coming season. This, in itself, is an arduous labor, for the cost of transportation becomes, necessarily, a most important consideration in his calculations.

The manager of a large show, however, can do this with comparative ease, since he does not fear opposition so much as does the manager of the small show and

consequently, may choose his own territory, while his small opponent must skirmish around to get out of the way of the larger show. . . .

Therefore, the route of the big show is completed on paper not later than the first of February, and the first agent, usually the railroad contractor, begins his duties. . . .

Previous to 1872 the ''railroad circus'' was an unknown quantity. Like all other circuses of the day, the big show of which I was the manager traveled by wagon. During our first season our receipts amounted in round numbers to $400,000, exclusive of side shows, concerts and candy stands. Of course, we showed in towns of all sizes and our daily receipts ranged from $1,000 to $7,000. Finding that the receipts in the larger towns were frequently twice and three times as much as in the smaller ones, I became convinced that we could at least double our receipts if we could ignore the small places and travel only from one big town to another, thereby drawing the cream of the trade from the adjacent small towns instead of trying to give a separate exhibition in each. This was my reason for determining to move the show by rail the following season. . . .

Small shows had, prior to this time, traveled to a limited extent by rail; but not with accommodations like ours. Such shows consisted of seven or eight cars, whereas ours numbered sixty-one. . . .

Now we had Pullman cars for the artists, sleeping cars for the laborers, box cars for the extra stuff, palace cars for the horses and other large animals, such as were required for teaming, parades, etc., and platform cars for wagons, chariots, cages and carriages. Thus the Herculean task of putting the first railroad show of any magnitude on its own cars was successfully accomplished. . . .

Finally, however, system and good order came out of chaos. Once properly launched on our season, we were able to give three performances daily, and quite often made jumps of one hundred miles in one night. The scheme, as I had predicted, completely revolutionized the show business. . . . It also greatly advertised us, vast crowds assembling at the depots to see us load and unload. . . .

Our experience with the vast crowds of the season before had given us the idea of building two rings and giving a double performance. This, of course, doubled our company, but it kept the audience in their seats, since they were precisely as well off in one part of the canvas as in another, whereas in the old one-ring show we found it impossible to prevent the people who were farthest from the ring from standing up. They would rush to the front and thus interfere with many other people. This two-ring arrangement seemed to obviate this difficulty, and, as it at once hit the popular fancy, it proved a great drawing-card for us and others, for within a few months smaller showmen all over the country began to give two-ring performances. . . .

It may not be generally known to the public, but it is a fact, that nearly one-half of the entire expenditure of a circus is incurred in the work of the advance brigades. The advertising material, its distribution, express, freight and cartage, together with the salaries, transportation and living expenses of seventy-five to one hundred men, amount to vast sums of money. . . .

Though, of course, there is a limit to possible receipts, there is no doubt that the business secured is in proportion to the sum used in advertising, and it is almost impossible to draw the line at which judicious advertising should stop. . . .

In 1880, in order to boom the "Newly United Monster Shows," I arranged some very peculiar and novel advertising features in the way of three cars especially fitted out for the use of my advance agents. The first brigade was accompanied by an enormous organ, for which a car was built, the latter being drawn through the streets by an elephant. . . . This, of course, attracted the people, and the brigade would then advertise the show by a lavish distribution of handbills. . . .

My second advertising car was fitted up with another enormous organ of far-reaching power, and attracted much attention, while my third and last advertising brigade rejoiced in the possession of an engine to which was attached a steam whistle of such power and discordant tone that it could be heard for miles. . . .

As that car with its whistle would steam into a town, its inhabitants would flock as one man to see what it was that had so disturbed their peace, and thus it was that we were enabled to advertise more thoroughly than any show before or since. . . .

Between these three advertising brigades I had smaller companies, accompanied by a colored brass band, which discoursed pleasant music while my bill posters decorated the dead walls and boards. The band also gave concerts at night upon the public square and, between pieces, a good speaker would draw attention to the excellences of the coming show.

A uniformed brigade of trumpeters was also sent through the country on horseback, and a band of Jubilee [gospel] singers marched through the streets singing the praises of the "Newly United Shows." Added to these attractions were two stereopticons that pictured, from some house-top or window, the main features of the show. This, together with perhaps the most liberal newspaper advertising that ever had been done, made the whole advance work as near absolute perfection in show business as possible. . . .

The printing bills of a first-class show are enormous. My lithograph bill alone, the last successful season of my show, amounted to $40,000, and this was before the days of extensive lithographing. . . .

Shows thrive best on bluster and buncombe [bunkum]. Years of experience have taught me that the traveling show business handled by capitalists who have never been trained in other lines of enterprise can never succeed. I have often been reproved by business men who were astounded at the lavish and apparently wasteful expenditures of the circus for "show and blow," and who have insisted that these expenses should be cut in half. It is true that such reckless expenditures in any ordinary commercial undertaking would be disastrous, but it is the life of the big show. When it is possible thoroughly to arouse the curiosity of the public, expense should be a secondary consideration. . . .

I have often been asked what it costs to start a circus and menagerie. This is a most difficult question to answer, since it depends entirely on the size and preten-

sions of the enterprise in question. Shows vary in size from cheap affairs, capable of being carried in three railroad cars, to the elaborate institutions which require two long special trains for their transportation. The expense of running a large show is enormous, although in advertising this expense is usually exaggerated. . . .

In the eye of the law a circus must have feats of horsemanship in its program, and such shows have to pay a ''circus'' license, which in some states and cities is very high. If, however, the shows do not give any riding, their performance simply consisting of leaping, tumbling, and athletic feats, then a license may be taken out at a greatly reduced price; and this accounts for the almost numberless small shows which annually tour the country. Of the circus and menagerie show proper I do not think there are more than twenty in America; but of tented exhibitions, billed as ''railroad shows,'' there are several hundred. The tented exhibitions employ from fifty to six hundred men each, and the capital invested in them runs from $5,000 to $250,000. . . .

The flat and stock cars used by circuses are much more substantially constructed than the ordinary ones used in the railroad freight business, and are considerably larger, most of them being sixty feet in length and fitted with springs similar to those of passenger trains. Cars of this description cost from $500 to $800 each. . . .

The small circuses that hover around Chicago and the larger cities of the West in summer usually use a tent about eighty feet across, with two thirty-foot middle pieces. This, equipped with poles, seats and lights, costs about $800. These tents are made of light material. The larger canvases have to be made of stouter stuff, and a tent suitable for hippodrome or spectacular shows, which must be about 225 feet in width and 425 or 450 feet in length, would cost about $7,000. . . .

The draught horses . . . bought by me averaged $200 each; the usual circus horse, however, costs much less, and so long as it does its work all right [in parades and general haulage] the main purpose is answered. . . . Ring horses, whether for a ''pad'' or a ''bare-back'' act, must have a regular gait, as without it the rider is liable to be thrown. They are frequently and generally owned by the performers themselves, and I have known a crack rider to pay as high as $2,000 for one whose gait exactly suited him. . . .

Though it would be comparatively easy to start a circus and menagerie equipped almost entirely with second-hand paraphernalia, the reader will see from the following figures that the cost of starting a new first-class circus and menagerie is another proposition. Here are a few official figures on the cost of a first-class circus and menagerie which have never before been made public. They are taken from my private record, or invoice book:

20 cages at $350,	$7,000.00
2 Band wagons at $1,500 each,	3,000.00
3 Chariots at $3,000 each,	9,000.00
1 Wardrobe wagon,	800.00
1 Ticket wagon,	400.00

The above for the parade.	
Animals to fill these cages will average about:	
2 Lions,	2,000.00
2 Royal Tigers,	2,000.00
2 Leopards,	400.00
1 Yak,	150.00
1 Horned Horse,	500.00
2 Camels,	300.00
2 Elephants,	3,000.00
(As small elephants have been delivered here for $1,000 each, this is probably a fair average.)	
1 Hippopotamus,	5,000.00
1 Rhinoceros,	5,000.00
2 Cages of monkeys,	1,000.00
1 Kangaroo,	200.00
1 Cassowary,	200.00
1 Ostrich,	500.00
1 Giraffe,	1,500.00
Other small animals including hyenas, bears, ichneumon [mongoose], birds, etc.,	2,000.00
12 Baggage wagons at $200,	2,400.00
4 Roman chariots,	1,000.00
125 Horses at $125 each,	15,625 .00
This price is above the average.	
125 Harnesses at $15,	1,875.00
2 Advertising cars,	5,000.00
Wardrobe,	3,000.00
2 Sleepers,	5,000.00
10 Flat cars at $400,	4,000.00
6 Horse cars at $400,	2,400.00
Elephant car,	500.00
Tents,	4,000.00
	$88,750.00

This could be reduced by eliminating the rhinoceros, hippopotamus, giraffe, and other very expensive animals, but to this must be added considerable money for stakes, shovels, picks, stake pullers, extra ropes, tickets, blank contracts and all necessary printing, which would bring the cost of the usual ''million dollar'' circus and menagerie up to about $86,000.

On all this property there is not one dollar of insurance. Once, when on the road, a live stock insurance company came to me to insure our horses, but at the rate at

which they wanted to insure them I soon convinced them that we could not make any money.

I might add that a circus and menagerie at the figures I have given would be far better and larger than the average "million dollar show" now on the road, there being certainly not more than three aggregations that cost more than the amount I have given. No man should attempt the show business who has not a fortune, and also plenty of that other kind of capital quite as essential to his success—long experience on the road.

Apart from a brief tour of the South in 1836 and organizing the Asiatic Caravan in the early 1850s, P. T. Barnum had comparatively little direct experience of circuses. His partnership with Coup and Castello in the 1870s involved him in publicity and finance rather than daily management, but, as he informed his friend Mark Twain, he took an interest in all details.

Selected Letters of P. T. Barnum, ed. A. H. Saxon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 189–90.

Bridgeport, 19 January 1875

My dear Clemens,

. . . My *daily* expenses in New York are nearly $5000. They will be more than that while travelling. Last August I had an immense tent made, over 800 feet long by 400 broad, and transported it to Boston, where I built seats to accommodate 11,000 persons, & I transported my entire hippodrome to Boston. There were over 1200 men, women, & children engaged by me; 750 horses, including 300 blooded race horses & ponies; camels, elephants, buffaloes, English stag and stag hounds, ostriches, &c. &c. (Don't mention menagerie of lions, tigers, & other wild beasts, for I don't take them *travelling* with hippodrome.)

Now the cost of tent, seats, and transporting the entire hippodrome & paraphernalia to Boston by rail was over $50,000. And yet though I was in Boston but 3 weeks, I was fully reimbursed and had a handsome surplus. We accommodated over 20,000 persons to our two performances each day and frequently turned away visitors for want of room. Cheap excursion trains ran daily on all the roads leading into Boston, and thousands daily came in them.

Now by having *two* of these 800 feet tents, so as to keep one continually a day ahead, I shall next summer take the entire hippodrome on 125 railroad cars of my own to all the *larger* towns in New England and the middle & western states, frequently stopping but one day in a town. I can easily lose half a million of dollars next summer *unless* I can in advance so awaken and electrify the country as to have *everybody* join in getting up excursion trains so as to hit me where I open the hippodrome. If I *can* do this, I can *make* half a million, so it is a pretty big stake to play for—hence my anxiety. I take along *sleeping* cars wherein nearly all my 1200 employees lodge every night (I put up berths in ordinary passenger cars), and I take along cooks and cooking tents

where all except 150 of my 1200 employees get every meal they eat during the travelling season. Horse tents also accommodate my horses, elephants, camels, &c. I carry blacksmiths & blacksmith tents to do all my horse-shoeing, repairing of chariots, wagons, &c. I also carry harness makers. I carry carpenters and builders who precede the show ten days to build the seats. I carry wardrobe men and women to repair and care for the wardrobe, which has cost me over $70,000 and which I use in processions and all the various plays, scenes, and the great street procession which occurs every morning. I take two immense bands of music, first-class.

My hippodromic exhibitions include the Roman chariot races and many other acts that were shown in the Roman Colosseum 1600 years ago, and on a scale that has not been witnessed in this world during the last thousand years. My Roman chariots are driven by Amazons instead of men.

But I show besides scores of thrillingly interesting scenes which Rome never saw. . . .

The great English stag hunt wherein 150 ladies and gentlemen appear on horseback all dressed in appropriate hunting costumes, with the English stags and a large pack of real English stag hounds, depicts a scene worth going a hundred miles to see.

Then of course we have hurdle races by ladies; Roman standing races (the riders standing on bareback horses); flat races by English, American, and French jockeys, with the best blooded race horses to be found in Europe; races by camels ridden by Arabs; elephant races; liberty races by 40 wild horses turned loose; ostrich races, monkey races, and the most remarka[ble] performances by elephants and other animals. Taken altogether, this is a colossal travelling exhibition *never* before equalled and what no other man in this generation will ever dare to wish. It involves a capital of nearly a million of dollars. My expectation is to take it all to Europe next autumn, for it will prove even a greater wonder there than here.

Truly yours,
P. T. Barnum

In 1884 the Barnum circus upgraded its dime museum "Congress of Nations" to the "Ethnological Congress of Savage Peoples," and billed as central attractions, "Bestial Australian Cannibals; Mysterious Aztecs; Embruited Big-Lipped Botocudoes; Wild Moslem Nubians; Ferocious Zulus; Buddhist Monks; Invincible Afghans; Pagan Burmese Priests; Ishmaelitish Todars; Dusky Idolatrous Hindus; Sinuous Nautch Girls; Annamite Dwarfs; Haughty Syrians; Oriental Giants; Herculean Japanese; Kaffres; Arabs; Persians; Kurds; Ethiopians; Cicassians; Polynesians; Tasmanians; Tartars; Partans; Etc."[8]

In the 1888 illustrated guidebook for junior readers, Barnum leads his New York "child-friends," Tom and his younger sisters, through his circus. After they meet the performers, and before they see the animals, they go "Among The Curiosities."

THE CIRCUS

P. T. Barnum and Sarah J. Burke, *P. T. Barnum's Circus and Menagerie: Text and Illustrations Arranged for Little People* (New York: White and Allen, 1888).

"Look at the dhirty nagurs, Bridget!"

This is what Tom heard an Irishman say, and he turned his head to see a band of Nubians, black as crows, but not at all dirty.

"I don't like them," said Gay; so Mr. Barnum took them to look at the Chinese baby, sitting in its mama's lap. It clutched its little hand tight in Gay's lace cap, but she only laughed. Tom soon left the "dhirty nagurs" for the Afghan chiefs, one of whom let Tom handle his sword. Oh, how he longed to keep it! He thought—he was only nine, you know—how it would make the fellows on his block stare! But just then he happened to spy the Zulu warriors, and they were so much more horrible than the Afghans, that Tom returned the sword with thanks.

"Do Zulu *women* fight?" asked Trixie, seeing a fierce-looking woman in the group.

"You bet!" said the shortest of the Zulu men, in very good English, while he rolled his eyes toward the ceiling, with a sigh.

"I say, Trix," said Tom, wandering back to examine some old English coats of mail which had escaped his attention before, "wouldn't you like to see a tournament?"

Mama had read to him one of Sir Walter Scott's stories, with its magnificent description of the tournaments of early days in Merry England. Many a night as he lay in bed, he had tried to picture to himself the scenes that the great story-teller had described, and had fallen asleep to dream of Good Queen Bess and her gallant knights and lovely ladies.

"What is a tournament?" asked Trixie.

"Why, don't you know? A tournament is—a tournament was"—

"Was a sham fight between knights on horseback," said Mr. Barnum, coming to his assistance. "It was one of the ways in which the kings and queens of Europe entertained their royal guests, hundreds of years ago."

"Well, I should rather see a tournament than a bull fight," said Trixie.

Bull-fights and tournaments! Such difficult subjects for a baby to understand! But Gay could appreciate what she called the "Skye-dog people."

"She means Skye terrier—she is so little!" said Trixie, sweetly.

Oh, how the children laughed at the dog-faced family! "Sure enough, they are like terriers in petticoats," said Trixie, "and they look as though their bangs had slipped down on their cheeks!" She almost expected ro hear them cry, "Yap! Yap!" but they didn't.

"I wonder how he does it!" said Tom to himself, looking at the tattooed man. "I'm going to ask him! I'd like to try it on some little out-of-the-way place on myself." But, when questioned, the curious fellow said that it could only be done with a dry black feather, plucked from the wing of a hokey-pokey—"and," he added, "hokey-pokeys are very scarce in America." So Tom gave up the idea.

''What a grumpy old lot!'' he complained later, refering to the Indian family. He had been teasing them, and Mr. Barnum knew it. ''Ugh! Ugh!'' they had sighed, in turn and in chorus.

''Tom,'' said Mr. Barnum frowning, ''I'm ashamed of you!'' and I am glad to say that Tom felt ashamed of himself.

The fattest old chief then turned to the fattest old squaw, and said something which I am sure meant, in English, ''That boy ought to be scalped, and I'd like to be the one to do it!''

Quite as unsociable as the Indians were the wild Australians. They were throwing boomerangs, or curved sticks of wood, which, if they struck nothing, returned to the hand of the thrower. ''It would save a deal of scamper and looking if a fellow's ball would do that,'' said Tom.

In 1884 the five Ringling brothers from Baraboo, Wisconsin, introduced the grandly named Yankee Robinson's Great Show, Ringling Brothers' Carnival of Novelties, and DeNar's Museum of Living Wonders. They were successful from the start and began to eliminate their competitors, and in 1907 they purchased the major rival, Barnum and Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth. In 1910 Alfred Ringling gave magazine readers a "behind-the-scenes" insight into the operations of the show.

Alfred T. Ringling, "What the Public Does Not See at a Circus," *National Magazine* 12 (1900): 189–92.

The wonders of a big modern circus are not so much in the show the audience sees, strange though this may be, as in the working details that lie hidden just beyond the public's view. On the other side of the tri-colored curtains that separate the dressing-rooms from the spectators, is found the real life of the actor-folk; the rings and stages are merely the screens upon which such parts of the view judged to be most pleasing to the circus-goers are shown.

As a characteristic of American life, ''circus day,'' no matter on what day it occurs, is a semi-public holiday. We have other holidays, but there is only one circus day.

In the rush and activity of city life, the coming and passing of the circus, though no less interesting, is not so emphasized by its surroundings as in a country town. Here one may see to-day a meadow where only the peaceful grazing of the cows gives life to the scene, and to-morrow, Aladdin-like, a great city of white tents has arisen, its many flags and acres of canvas undulating in the morning breeze, its inhabitants, numbering many hundreds, moving about with the nonchalance of old settlers, yet there only for the day.

Enchantment played no part in the erection of the tents. Hard work and quick, intelligent action, dominated by system, comprised the magic that reared this city of an hour, which has its blacksmith shop with ringing anvil, barber shop, hotel, wagon

shop, post office and paint shop. In fact, all it needs to be a town in itself is a state charter and a village council: for it has its doctor, its 1awyer, its veterinary surgeon, its mail carrier and its detective.

To transport the Ringling Brothers' circus and menagerie, sixty-five cars, averaging sixty feet in length, are required. Every cage, chariot, horse, elephant or other animal has an individual spot on one of the cars for it. Everything is loaded at night with special reference to the order in which it will be required on the morrow, and the several trains follow each other in regular order, as well.

The first train of cars carries the superintendents and working people, the draught horses, tent and pole wagons and canvas. As soon as this train reaches the next town, the superintendent of tents, with his assistants, starts for the show grounds to ''lay out'' the lot. With tape lines the location of each tent is soon measured out and a perfect plan of the grounds made. In a few minutes more, hundreds of small steel pins mark the places where the stakes which hold the tent ropes are to be driven.

The canvasmen are detailed in squads of six and eight pounding at one stake, their rapid strokes following each each other like the regular swing of a pendulum. It takes ten minutes to lay out the lot and about a half hour to drive the stakes, and then the welcome sound of the breakfast horn is heard.

While the chef and his assistants are cooking the breakfast, the waiters, dishwashers and other cook-tent employees erect the dining tents, place the tables in position and get them ready for an army of employees. Forty minutes to build a hotel, and on its completion to have a meal ready for hundreds of hungry men! It is quick time, but it is part of the system, and a very necessary part, for it has a great deal to do with the driving of the tent stakes. It accelerates the speed of the sledge gangs, who know that they will not be ready for breakfast any sooner than breakfast will be ready for them.

All of the working people of the circus eat on the show grounds. The performers, musicians and principals have meals served to them in specially constructed Pullman dining cars.

While the canvasmen are eating breakfast, tentage in immense bales, ropes and long poles accumulate on the lot until a sight is presented which to the novice seems chaotic, but the speed with which the long poles are raised skyward, the tents unrolled and laced together and ropes fastened to hold everything in place, shows that every bit of circus paraphernalia is unloaded by the teamsters just where needed.

The first show for the public is the parade. In one-day stands, except in the event of some unusual delay, it leaves the show grounds at ten o'clock. In this long cavalcade of hundreds of horses, uniformed people and gaily trapped animals everything has its place.

On the return of the parade to the show grounds the cages and dens are wheeled into the menagerie tent. The cages must be placed snugly together. Horses cannot do this, so two men take a short tongue and thus guide each vehicle into place while an

elephant pushes it. The intelligence displayed by these big beasts in performing this work is truly remarkable and as interesting as any of their feats in the rings.

I remember once seeing one of our elephants called ''Babe'' pushing with all her might to move the hippopotamus den into place. The ground was muddy, and the big pachyderm's efforts merely tended to sink the big van deeper into the yielding sod. After several attempts to move the den, Babe stepped back a few feet, stood as if reflecting a moment and then deliberately wound her trunk around the axle and raised the wagon out of the mud, at the same time pushing it forward while the men in front ''poled'' it into position.

In teaching an elephant to perform in the ring the trainer depends upon the animal's intelligence and memory, while the horse learns to do things from habit. It would seem from this that a greater degree of patience is necessary in training a horse. This, however, is not the case, for the horse, after being induced to do a thing many times, will from force of habit repeat the thing, while the elephant has enough of the reasoning sense in him to question the utility of repeating his lessons at times.

In the winter quarters of our circus is a large brick building where the elephants are housed. In the center of the structure is a training ring of the regulation circus size. All winter the trainers are busy teaching the elephants new tricks and rehearsing them in the old ones. To teach an elephant to dance a hornpipe, to play a barrel-organ, to beat a drum and to play upon a brass trombone are achievements which require patient hours and many of them; and these are given ungrudgingly by the trainers during the long winter months while the circus is at rest—and what is called ''rest'' with a circus is really a continuation under different circumstances of the ''strenuous life'' of the showman.

The hardest task in teaching an elephant is to make him stand on his front feet, while his rear extremities point in the direction of ten o'clock. Only by years of patient work can this be done, and the elephant selected for the work must be a young animal so that the muscles needed to maintain a position so unnatural for such a heavy beast may be developed and strengthened for the feat. There is no particular rule for training an elephant to do thing of this kind. The trainer simply uses his resources to get the animal in the position desired as often as possible.

Madame Noble's horse, Jupiter, which walks across the ring in a vertical position, while the daring horsewoman maintains her position in the saddle, was taught the feat while a colt by being fed apples from a point high above his head, which he could reach only by raising himself to the position for which he has since become famous. The tender muscles of the colt were thus developed to sustain him in a position unnatural to the horse of everyday life; and the task of afterward making him perform this work in a place where apples could not be fed to him from a derrick, was solved by rewarding him immediately after he passed from the big tent into the passage-way to the stables.

Kindness, patience and perseverance are the key to the training of all animals. Of

the sixty-one horses in the O'Brien act, which is such a leading feature of our ring performances, each animal had to be first trained individually; and only after many months of patient work could more than one horse be added at a time, the number training together being increased by twos and fours gradually, until the entire sixty-one were brought together.

Every animal has some inherent trait by which he is made to learn. All animals in varying degrees are reached by their sense of taste. A dominant and sensitive chord in the horse is pride, and the trainer must sound it at proper moments. He must be a diplomat in dispensing flattery to the proud animal. He needs all the finesse of a suitor wooing a high-strung belle of the season. While the animals of a circus are worked hard and long to perfect them in their feats, the people who perform in the rings, on the stages, hippodrome and races, each working from a personal motive and imbued with individual ambitions, submit themselves to a most rigid discipline of training.

Abstemiousness is a positive necessity to the performer who would have his nerves and muscles steady and strong for his "stunts." The regime of exercise to which he applies himself both winter and summer produces a physical type so sound that there is no thirst for stimulants. Fresh air, and lungs developed to receive it, shower baths and a good digestion make him a normal, physical type who, in consequence, enjoys moral health as well.

Probably the most mysterious part of the circus, and the one which is hidden the most securely from the public eye, is the dressing room which is divided into two compartments, one for the men and one for the women. Each one of these enclosures has a row of trunks laid around the sides, while the center is mapped out like the streets of a town. Each trunk is a dressing table, and it is not unusual to see 150 persons dressing in the aisles of either room.

Those who have seen the wonderful act of Millie Turnore, have, perhaps, never thought of her except as a young woman of nerve and courage.

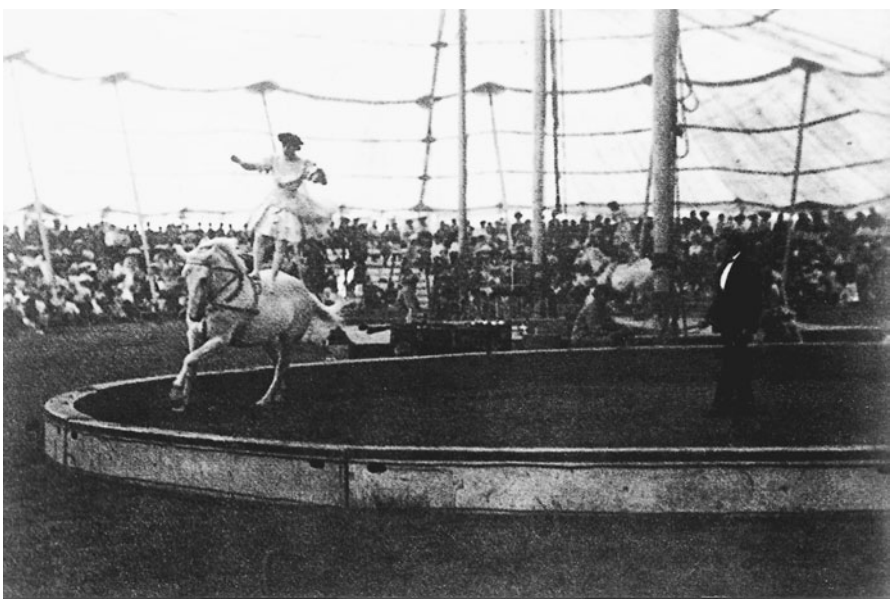
As they watch her swinging in the dome of the tent on the slender rod of the trapeze, never once touching her hands, they are too lost in amazement to inquire into that part of her life which is beyond the tent. To the spectator she is a circus performer, but those acquainted with her domestic life know her as a loving mother. In a seminary in the east there are three girls, who twice each week write to this brave woman. One is just finishing her education and the other two are steadily advancing in their studies. The money that is providing these daughters with a college education is earned by the woman whose performance has thrilled thousands.

In the 1890s circuses published route books of the year's itinerary. At the turn of the century, in a year beginning on April 2 and ending on November 19, one unnamed circus [probably Barnum and Bailey's] traveled 11,569 miles, visiting 167 towns and cities in 26 states and provinces in the eastern United States and Canada. Sunday was the rest day for the performers human and animal, an arrangement that also recognized local sabbatarian wishes.

Big Business

W. C. Thompson, *On the Road with a Circus* (n.p.: Goldmann, 1903), 208–13.

DATE		TOWN	STATE	RAILROAD	MILES
APRIL	2–19	New York Sunday	N.Y.		
	21–26	Philadelphia Sunday	Pa.	Penn R.R.	99
	28–29	Baltimore	Md.		113
	30	Washington	D.C.		50
MAY	1	Washington			
	2	Hagerstown	Md.	B. & O. R.R.	77
	3	Cumberland Sunday	Md.		124
	5	Clarksburg	W.Va.		124
	6	Fairmont	W.Va.		82
	7	Connellsville	Pa.		70
	8	Washington	Pa.		96
	9–10	Pittsburg Sunday	Pa.		42



In 1906, Harry C. Rubincam, a member of Alfred Steiglitz's Photo-Secession group, captured a rare view of a circus equestrienne who has just leaped over the banner stretched across the ring. Hallmark Collection.

	12	Johnstown	Pa.	Penn R.R.	79
	13	Altoona	Pa.		39
	14	Lewistown	Pa.		75
	15	York			97
	16	Reading	Pa.		89
	17	Pottsville	Pa.		36
		Sunday			
	19	Wilkesbarre	Pa.		118
	20	Scranton	Pa.	C.R.R. of N.J.	18
	21	Allentown	Pa.		103
	22	Easton	Pa.		17
	23	Elizabeth	N.J.		62
	24	Jersey City	N.J.	Penn R.R.	14
		Sunday			
	26–31	Brooklyn	N.Y.	Ferry	
JUNE	2	Paterson	N.J.	Erie R.R.	17
	3	Newburg	N.Y.		47
	4	Kingston	N.Y.	West Shore	32
	5	Schenectady	N.Y.		70
	6	Gloversville	N.Y.	W.S.F.J. & G.	37
	7	Utica	N.Y.	N.Y.C. & H.R.	61
		Sunday			
	9	Poughkeepsie	N.Y.	N.Y.C. & H.R.	165
	10	Danbury	Conn.	N.Y.N.H.& H.	63
	11	Ansonia	Conn.	N.Y.N.H.& H.	30
	12	Meriden	Conn.	N.Y.N.H.& H.	31
	13	Holyoke	Mass.	B. & M.	49
	14	Greenfield	Mass.	B. & M.	38
		Sunday			
	16	Gardner	Mass.	B. & M.	40
	17	Lowell	Mass.	B. & M.	46
	18	Lawrence	Mass.	B. & M.	13
	19	Concord	Mass.	B. & M.	45
	20	Manchester	N.H.	B. & M.	18
	21	Haverhill	Mass.	B. & M.	33
		Sunday			
	23	Portsmouth	N.H.	B. & M.	33
	24	Biddeford	Me.	B. & M.	43
	25	Portland	Me.	B. & M.	15
	25	Lewiston	Me.	Grand Trunk	35
	26	Berlin	N.H.	Grand Trunk	74
	27	Sherbrooke	Quebec	Grand Trunk	99

		Sunday			
	30	Montreal	Quebec	C.P.	102
JULY	1	Montreal	Quebec	C.P.	
	2	Valleyfield	Quebec	C.P. & C.A.	51
	3	Ottawa	Ontario	C.A.	52
	4	Cornwall	Ontario	N.Y. & O.	85
	5	Kingston	Ontario	Grand Trunk	57
		Sunday			
	7	Belleville	Ontario	Grand Trunk	51
	8	Peterboro	Ontario	Grand Trunk	64
	9	Barrie	Ontario	Grand Trunk	88
	10	Toronto	Ontario	Grand Trunk	64
	11	Hamilton	Ontario	Grand Trunk	39
	12	Brantford	Ontario	Grand Trunk	27
		Sunday			
	14	Guelph	Ontario	Grand Trunk	36
	15	Stratford	Ontario	Grand Trunk	40
	16	Woodstock	Ontario	Grand Trunk	23
	17	London	Ontario	Grand Trunk	29
	18	St. Thomas	Ontario	L.E. & D.R.	15
	19	Chatham	Ontario	Grand Trunk	62
		Sunday			
	21	Buffalo	N.Y.	Grand Trunk	186
	22	Rochester	N.Y.	N.Y.C. & H.R.	69
	23	Geneva	N.Y.	N.Y.C. & H.R.	51
	24	Auburn	N.Y.	N.Y.C. & H.R.	26
	25	Cortland	N.Y.	Lehigh Valley	43
	26	Binghamton	N.Y.	D.L. & W.	43
		Sunday			
	28	Ithaca	N.Y.	D.L. & W.	55
	29	Elmira	N.Y.	D.L. & W.	70
	30	Williamsport	Pa.	Penn. Line	78
	31	Lock Haven	Pa.	Penn. Line	25
AUGUST	1	Dubois	Pa.	Penn. Line	101
	2	Butler	Pa.	Penn. Line	122
		Sunday			
	4	Wheeling	W.Va.	B. & O.	110
	5	Zanesville	Ohio	B. & O.	83
	6	Mansfield	Ohio	B. & O.	87
	7	Lima	Ohio	P. Ft. W. & C.	86
	8	Springfield	Ohio	D. S.	67
	9	Columbus	Ohio	Big Four	45

		Sunday			
	11	Piqua	Ohio	P. C. C. & St. L.	73
	12	Richmond	Ind.	P. C. C. & St. L.	47
	13	Indianapolis	Ind.	P. C. C. & St. L.	68
	14	Anderson	Ind.	Big Four	36
	15	Marion	Ind.	Big Four	33
	16	Logansport	Ind.	P. C. C. & St. L.	40
		Sunday			
	18	Springfield	Ill.	Wabash	195
	19	Jacksonville	Ill.	Wabash	34
	20	Quincy	Ill.	Wabash	87
	21	Keokuk	Iowa	Burlington	43
	22	Burlington	Iowa	Burlington	43
	23	Galesburg	Ill.	Burlington	40
		Sunday			
	25	Kewanee	Ill.	Burlington	32
	26	Sterling	Ill.	Burlington	92
	27	Aurora	Ill.	C. & N.W.	70
	28	Elgin	Ill.	C. & N.W.	27
	29	Racine	Wis.	C. & N.W.	72
	30	Waukesha	Wis.	C. & N.W.	42
		Sunday			
SEPT.	1	Marinette	Wis.	C. & N.W.	205
	2	Green Bay	Wis.	C. & N.W.	52
	3	Oshkosh	Wis.	C. & N.W.	48
	4	Janesville	Wis.	C. & N.W.	103
	5	Freeport	Wis.	C.M & St.P.	50
	6	Rock Island	Ill.	C.M & St.P.	93
		Sunday			
	8	Peoria	Ill.	C.R.I. & P.	100
	9	Lincoln	Ill.	C. & A.	93
	10	Pontiac	Ill.	C. & A.	64
	11	Bloomington	Ill.	C. & A.	35
	12	Danville	Ill.	Big Four	80
	13	Lafayette	Ind.	Wabash	47
		Sunday			
	15	Huntington	Ind.	Wabash	84
	16	Defiance	Ohio	Wabash	84
	17	Toledo	Ohio	Wabash	29
	18	Findlay	Ohio	T. & O. C.	44
	19	Bellefontaine	Ohio	Big Four	63
	20	Dayton	Ohio	Big Four	58

		Sunday			
	22	Chillicothe	Ohio	C.H. & D.	81
	23	Athens	Ohio	B. & O. S. W.	60
	24	Charleston	W. Va.	T. & O. C.	103
	25	Huntington	W. Va.	C. & O.	50
	26	Mt. Sterling	Ky.	C. & O.	107
	27	Lexington	Ky.	C. & O.	33
		Sunday			
	29	Chattanooga	Tenn.	I. & C.	254
	30	Tullahoma	Tenn.	N.C. & St.L.	82
OCT.	1	Nashville	Tenn.	N.C. & St.L.	69
	2	Paris	Tenn.	N.C. & St.L.	117
	3	Jackson	Tenn.	N.C. & St.L.	80
	4	Memphis	Tenn.	N.C. & St.L.	85
		Sunday			
	6	Tupelo	Miss.	K.C.S.F. & M.	105
	7	Birmingham	Ala.	K.C.S.F. & M.	146
	8	Anniston	Ala.	Southern	64
	9	Rome	Ga.	Southern	62
	10	Atlanta	Ga.	Southern	74
	11	Athens	Ga.	S.A.L.	73
		Sunday		S.A.L.	
	13	Augusta	Ga.	S.A.L.-C. & W. C.	119
	14	Anderson	S.C.	C. & W. C.	103
	15	Greenwood	S.C.	C. & W. C.-S. A. L.	63
	16	Greenville	S.C.	Southern	59
	17	Spartanburg	S.C.	Southern	32
	18	Charlotte	N.C.	Southern	70
		Sunday			
	20	Wilmington	N.C.	S.A.L.	187
	21	Florence	[S].C.	A.C.L.	110
	22	Columbia	[S].C.	A.C.L.	82
	23	Sumter	[S].C.	A.C.L.	43
	24	Charleston	[S].C.	A.C.L.	94
	25	Savannah	Ga.	A.C.L.	115
		Sunday			
	27	Jacksonville	Fla.	A.C.L.	172
	28	Waycross	Ga.	A.C.L.	75
	29	Valdosta	Ga.	A.C.L.	59
	30	Thomasville	Ga.	A.C.L.	45
	31	Albany	Ga.	A.C.L.	58
NOV.	1	Americus	Ga.	C. of G.	36

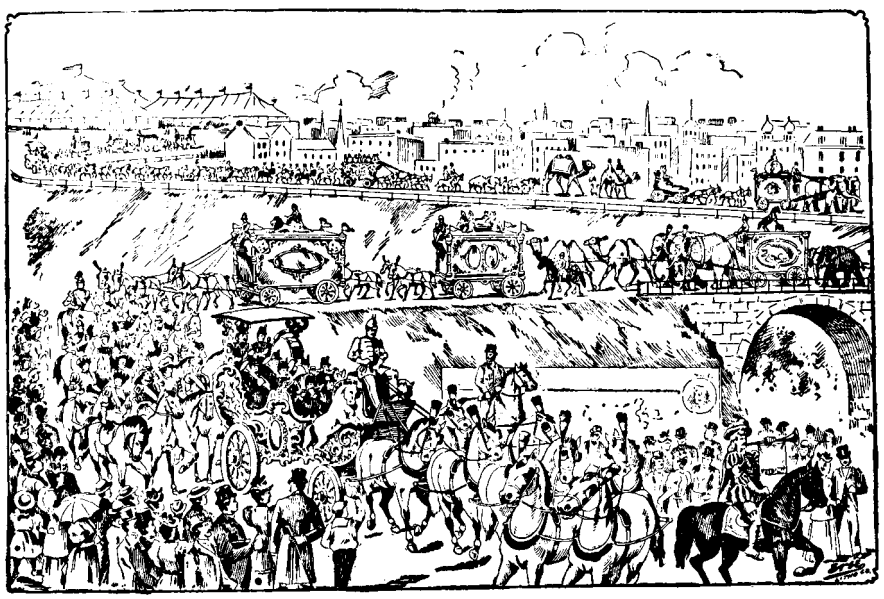
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Free Public Pageant Every Morning at 10 A. M.

Campbell Brothers circus toured the Midwest, and its 1905 poster trumpeted the glories of the free street parade. Ed Brady, *The Story of the Campbell Brothers Circus: The Canvas That Covered the Plains* (Traverse City, Neb.: n.p., 1981).

	Sunday			
3	Macon	Ga.	C. of G.	70
4	Columbus	Ga.	C. of G.	100
5	Montgomery	Ala.	C. of G.	95
6	Selma	Ala.	W. of A.	50
7	Meridian	Miss.	M. & O.	73
8	West Point	Miss.	Ill.Ct.Y. & M.V.	9
	Sunday			
10	Kosciusko	Miss.	Y. & M.V.	70
11	Greenwood	Miss.	Y. & M.V.	73
12	Greenville	Miss.	Y. & M.V.	132
13	Vicksburg	Miss.	Y. & M.V	82
14	Fort Gibson	Miss.	Y. & M.V	30
15	Baton Rouge	La.	Y. & M.V	116
	Sunday			
17	New Orleans	La.	Y. & M.V	89
18	New Orleans	La.		
19	New Orleans	La.		

The Audience

Hamlin Garland grew up in many different communities in the Midwest. For those engaged in the hard, unrelenting toil and lonely misery of farm life, the traveling circus offered hope and escape. In late middle age Garland remembered the appeal of the annual visit of the horse-drawn caravans as the canvas "mushrooms" suddenly appeared in June in "Sun Prairie."

Hamlin Garland, *Boy Life on the Prairie* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 231–32, 234–36, 237–38, 243–47.

There were always three great public holidays,—the Fourth of July, the circus, and the Fair, which was really an autumn festival. . . . Of all these, the circus was easily the first of importance; even the Fourth of July grew pale and of small account in the ''glittering, gorgeous Panorama of Polychromatic Pictures,'' which once a year visited the country town, bringing the splendors of the great outside world in golden clouds, mystic as the sky at sunset. . . .

No one but a country boy can rightly measure the majesty and allurement of a circus. To go from the lonely prairie or the dusty corn-field and come face to face with the ''amazing aggregation of world-wide wonders'' was like enduring the visions of the Apocalypse. From the moment the advance man flung a handful of gorgeous bills over the corn-field fence, to the golden morning of the glorious day, the boys speculated and argued and dreamed of the glorious ''pageant of knights and ladies, glittering chariots, stately elephants, and savage tigers,'' which wound its way down the yellow

posters, a glittering river of Elysian splendors, emptying itself into the tent, which housed the ''World's Congress of Wonders.'' . . .

Teams came streaming in over every road till the town was filled as if it were the Fourth of July. Accustomed to the silence of the fields, or the infrequent groups of families in the school-houses, the prairie boys bowed with awe before the coming together of two thousand people. . . . Neighbors greeted each other in the midst of the throng with such fervor as travellers show when they unexpectedly meet in far-off Asiatic cities.

Every child waited in nervous impatience for the parade, which was not a piece of shrewd advertising to them, but a solemn function. A circus without a parade was unthinkable. It began somewhere—the country boys scarcely knew where—far in the mystery of the East and passed before their faces,—the pageantry of ''Ivanhoe'' and the ''Arabian Nights,'' and red Indians, and Mohammedanism and negro slavery,—in procession. It trailed a glorified dust, through which foolish and slobbering camels, and solemn and kingly lions, and mournful and sinister tigers, moved, preceded by the mountainous and slow-moving elephants, two and two, chained and sullen, while closely following, keeping step to the jar of great drums and the blaring voices of trumpets, ladies, beautiful and haughty of glance, with firmly-moulded busts, rode on parti-colored steeds with miraculous skill, their voices sounding small in the clangor of the streets. They were accompanied by knights corsletted in steel, with long plumes floating from their gleaming helmets. They, too, looked over the lowly people of the dusty plains with lofty and disdainful glance. . . .

The town boys, alert and self-sufficient, ran alongside the open chariot where the lion-tamer sat, surrounded by his savage pets, but the country boys could only stand and look, transfixed with pleasure and pain,—the pleasure of looking upon it, the pain of seeing it pass. They were wistful figures, standing there in dusty, ill-fitting garments, sensitive, subtle instruments on which the procession played, like a series of unrelated grandiose chords. As the lion passed, vague visions of vast deserts rose in their minds. Amid toppling towers these royal beasts prowled in the vivid moonlight. The camels came, reaching long necks athwart the shadows of distant, purple pyramids, and on hot stands at sunset, travellers, with garments outblown by the sirocco, passed near a crouching Arab. Mounted on elephants with uplifted trunks, tiger-hunters rode through long yellow grass. The feudal tournaments rolled back with the glittering knights. The wealth of the Indies shone in the golden chariots of the hippopotami. The jungles of Hindoostan were symbolized in the black and yellow bodies of the tigers, the heat of Africa shone from their terrible eyes. All that their readers, histories, and geographies had taught them seemed somehow illustrated, illuminated, irradiated, by this gorgeous pageantry. . . .

As they came out upon the green, the huge white tents, the fluttering flags, the crowds of people, the advertisements of the side-shows, the cries of the ticket-sellers and lemonade and candy men, appalled the country-boys. . . . The tumult was benumbing. On the left of the path was a long line of side-shows, with enormous

billowing canvas screens, on which were rudely painted the wonders within,—a pig playing a violin, an armless man sewing with his toes, a bearded lady, a fat boy, a man taking a silk hat from a bottle, while on a stool before each door stood alert and brazen-voiced young men, stern, contemptuous, and alien of face, declaring the virtues of each show, and inviting the people to enter. . . .

[T]he boys . . . moved slowly round the circle of the chariots, wherein the strange animals from the ends of the earth were on view. The squalling of parrakeets, the chatter and squawk of monkeys, the snorting of elephants, the deep, short, gusty elemental *ough* of the lions, the occasional snarl of the leopards, restlessly pacing, with yellow-green eyes glaring, the strange, odd, hot smells,—all these made the human fist very small and of no account. These beings whose footfalls were like velvet on velvet, whose bodies were swift as shadows and as terrible as catapults, whose eyes emitted the blaze of undying hate; these monstrous, watery, wide-mouthed, warty, uncouth creatures from rivers so remote that geographers had not reached them; these birds that outshone the prairie flowers in coloring; these serpents whose lazy, glittering coils concealed the strength of a hundred chains,—. . . and then, on top of it all, came the men and women of the circus proper. . . .

[T]he ring of the circus . . . crackled with the cries of alert men selling fans, ice-cream, sticks of candy, and bags of peanuts. It was already packed with an innumerable throng of people, whose faces were as vague to the boys as the fans they swung. Overhead the canvas lifted and billowed, and the poles creaked and groaned, and the rope snapped with the strain of the brisk outside wind. . . .

The band flared out into a strongly accentuated march, and forth from the mystic gateway came the knights and their ladies, riding two and two on splendid horses, and the boys thrilled with the joy of it. . . . The color, the glitter, the grace of gesture, the precision of movement, all so alien to the plains—so different from the slow movement of stiffened old farmers and faded and angular women, as well as from the shy and awkward manners of the beaux and belles of the country dances; the pliant joints and tireless limbs, the cool, calm judgment, the unerring eyes, the beautiful muscular bodies of the fearless women—a thousand impressions, new and deep-reaching, followed. . . .

Oh, to be one of those fine and splendid riders, with no more corn to plough, or hay to rake, or corn to husk. To go forth into the great, mysterious world, in the company of those grand men and lovely women; to be always admired by thousands, to bow and graciously receive thanks, . . . to be able to live under the shining canvas in the sound of music.

In William Dean Howells' nostalgic, semiautobiographical account of his youth in Hamilton, Ohio in the 1850s, the circus was uniquely exciting. The menagerie's parade was also colorful, but the performance of the exotic animals in the ring lacked action and drama. Most of all, it lacked the sense of moral danger that the spangled gods and goddesses of the circus ring had for small boys.

THE CIRCUS

William Dean Howells, *A Boy's Town* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1890), 99–102.

The boys liked to be at the circus early so as to make sure of the grand entry of the performers into the ring, where they caracoled [wheeled] around on horseback, and gave a delicious foretaste of the wonders to come. The fellows were united in this, but upon other matters feeling varied—some liked tumbling best; some the slack-rope; some bare-back riding; some the feats of tossing knives and balls and catching them. There never was more than one ring in those days; and you were not tempted to break your neck and set your eyes forever askew, by trying to watch all the things that went on at once in two or three rings. The boys did not miss the smallest feats of any performance, and they enjoyed them every one, not equally, but fully. They had their preferences, of course, as I have hinted; and one of the most popular acts was that where a horse has been trained to misbehave, so that nobody can mount him; and after the actors have tried him, the ring-master turns to the audience, and asks if some gentleman among them wants to try it. Nobody stirs, till at last a tipsy country-jake is seen making his way down from one of the top-seats towards the ring. He can hardly walk, he is so drunk, and the clown has to help him across the ring-board, and even then he trips and rolls over on the sawdust, and has to be pulled to his feet. When they bring him up to the horse, he falls against it; and the little fellows think he will certainly get killed. But the big boys tell the little fellows to shut up and watch out. The ring-master and the clown manage to get the country-jake on to the broad platform on the horse's back, and then the ring-master cracks his whip, and the two supes who have been holding the horse's head let go, and the horse begins cantering round the ring. The little fellows are just sure the country-jake is going to fall off, he reels and totters so; but the big boys tell them to keep watching out; and pretty soon the country-jake begins to straigthen up. He begins to unbotton his long long gray overcoat, and then he takes it off and throws it into the ring, where one of the supes catches it. Then he sticks a short pipe into his mouth, and pulls on an old wool hat, and flourishes a stick that the supe throws to him, and you see that he is an Irishman just come across the sea; and then off goes another coat, and you see a British soldier in white duck trousers and red coat. That comes off, and he is an American sailor, with his hands on his hips dancing a hornpipe. Suddenly away flash wig and beard and false-face, the pantaloons are stripped off with the same movement, the actor stoops for the reins lying on the horse's neck, and James Rivers, the greatest three-horse rider in the world nimbly caters on the broad pad, and kisses his hand to the shouting and cheering spectators as he dashes from the ring past the braying and bellowing brass-band into the dressing-room!

The big boys have known all along that he was not a real country-jake; but when the trained mule begins, and shakes everybody off, just like the horse, and another country-jake gets up, and offers to bet that he can ride that mule, nobody can tell whether he is a real country-jake or not. This is always the last thing in the perfor-

mance, and the boys have seen with heavy hearts many signs openly betokening the end which they knew was at hand. The actors have come out of the dressing-room door, some in their everyday clothes, and some with just overcoats on over their circus-dresses, and they lounge about near the band-stand watching the performance in the ring. Some of the people are already getting up to go out, and stand for this last act, and will not mind the shouts of "Down in front! Down there!" which the boys eagerly join in, to eke out their bliss a little longer by keeping away even the appearance of anything transitory in it. The country-jake comes stumbling awkwardly into the ring, but he is perfectly sober, and he boldly leaps astride the mule, which tries all its arts to shake him off, plunging, kicking, rearing. He sticks on, and everybody cheers him, and the owner of the mule begins to get mad and to make it do more things to shake the country-jake off. At last, with one convulsive spring, it flings him from its back, and dashes into the dressing-room, while the country-jake picks himself up and vanishes among the crowd.

Carl Sandburg was born in Galesburg, Illinois, and lived on East Berrien Street near the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Rail Road depot. In old age, the famous poet and writer reminisced about the parochialism of his youth surrounded by neighbors also of Scandinavian descent. In the 1890s the agricultural fair and the circus were rare events which shook the small town out of its torpor. For Sandburg, the sideshow had the greatest allure.

Carl Sandburg, *Always the Young Strangers* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1956), 189–90, 191–92, 193.

When the circus came to town we managed to shake out of sleep at four o'clock in the morning, grab a slice of bread and butter, and make a fast walk to the Q. yards to watch the unloading in the early daylight. A grand clear voice the man had who rode his horse a half block ahead of the elephants in the parade and cried out as though there might be hell to pay, "The elephants are coming, watch your horses!" First to one side of the street and then to the other he cried it and those who had skittish horses watched them.

After the unloading we went home for a quick breakfast and a run to the circus grounds, a big pasture at Main and Farnham near the city limits. If we were lucky we got jobs at carrying water for the elephants or lugging to the big tent the boards for the audience to sit on. After three or four hours of this useful and necessary work we were presented with slips of paper that let us in to see the big show in the afternoon. . . .

I walked round to the Side Show. There out front as a free show I saw the man with the elastic skin. He would pull it out from his face and neck and it would snap back into place. There I saw the tattooed man with fish, birds, brunette girls, ships, and many other shapes inked deep into his skin—and there too the Oriental Dancing Girl wearing few clothes and smiling about it to some giggling farm hands. The spieler,

a man with a thick upcurled mustache, leaned toward the farm hands and said in a voice as if for them only to hear, ''Go inside, boys. You can't lose. She takes off everything, every last stitch, and her muscles shake like a bowl of jelly. She makes a sick man feel like a wild monkey. What did you come here for, boys? She's got it. You can't lose.''

Then the spieler dropped his confidential way and turned to the main crowd and let go in a smooth, loud voice. You could tell he was used to what he was saying and had spoken the same words in the same way a thousand times. ''La-deez and gen-tul-men, beneath yon canvas we have the curi-aw-si-ties and mon-straw-si-ties—the Wild Man of Borneo, the smallest dwarf ever seen of mankind and the tallest giant that ever came into existence, the most marvelous snake ever brought to your fair city, a man-eating python captured in the darkest jungles of Africa ever penetrated by man. And I would call your particular attention to Jo Jo the dog-faced boy, born forty miles from land and forty miles from sea.'' . . . And we learned too from the spieler, the barker, about the dime. ''The price of admission, la-deez and gen-tul-men, is a dime, ten cents only, the tenth part of a dollar. Buy your tickets now before the big rush comes.''

I had a dime and a nickel in my pocket. With the dime, the tenth part of a dollar, I bought a ticket. I went in and heard the ventriloquist and his dummy: ''Will you spell a word for me, Danny?'' ''I'll try, what's the word?'' ''Constantinople.'' ''Why do you tell me you can't stand on an apple?'' I saw the Wild Man of Borneo and I could see he was a sad little shrimp and his whiskers messy. The Fat Woman, the Dwarf, the Giant, they seemed to me to be mistakes God had made, that God was absent-minded when he shaped them. I hung around the midget and his wife, watched them sign their names to photographs they sold at ten cents—and they were that pleasant and witty that I saw I had guessed wrong about them and they were having more fun out of life than some of the men in the Q. shops.

I stood a long time watching the Giant and noticed that he was quiet and satisfied about things and he didn't care one way or another whether people looked at him. He was so easy and calm about the way things were going that he reminded me of a big horse that didn't have to work and eats regular—and never buys patent medicines. If a smarty asked, ''How's the weather up there?'' he might lift one eye-brow and let it pass, for he had heard it often enough. Nor did I feel sorry for the python. He may have been a man-eater but he was sleeping as if he had forgotten whoever it was he had swallowed and digested. After a third and fourth time around, the only one I felt sorry for was the Wild Man of Borneo. He could have been the only lonely creature among all the freaks. The Oriental Dancing Girl certainly was no freak, an average good-looking showgirl, somewhat dark of skin and probably a gypsy. She twirled, she high-kicked, did a few mild wiggles, and when it was over I heard a farm hand saying, ''It's a sell. I thought from the way he talked outside that we was going to see a belly dance.'' ''Yeah,'' said another, ''and she didn't take off a stitch. It's a sell.''

Years later it came over me that at first sight of the freaks I was sad because I was

bashful. Except at home and among playmates, it didn't come easy for me to be looked at. . . . And there at the side show were these people, the freaks—and the business, the work, of each of them was to be looked at by thousands of people and they were paid to be looked at. . . .

Then I came to a man sitting on the ground, a deep-chested man with a face that had quiet on it and wouldn't bawl at you. I noticed he was barefoot. I looked up from his bare feet to see his arms gone, only stumps of arms at his shoulders. Between the first two toes of his right foot he held a card and lifted it toward me and said, ''Take it and read it.'' I read a perfect handwriting, every letter shaped smooth and nice. It said, ''I can write your name for you on a card for you to keep. The charge is only ten cents.'' I looked into his face. I said, ''I would if I had the ten cents. All I've got is a nickel.'' I took out the nickel and turned my pockets inside out and showed him that besides the nickel there was only a knife, a piece of string, and a buckeye. He took the nickel in his left foot. He put a pen between the first two toes of his right foot and on the card wrote ''Charles A. Sandburg,'' lifted the foot up toward me, and I took the card. I looked at it. It was the prettiest my name had ever been written. His face didn't change. All the time it kept that quiet look that didn't strictly belong with a circus. I was near crying. I said some kind of thanks and picked up my feet and ran.

As a teenager, W. E. "Doc" Van Elstine ran away from his middle-class New York family to join the Mighty Yankee Robinson Circus. His first escape was brief, but after studying medicine in dilatory fashion, he abandoned a conventional career and served as a roustabout in charge of seats and tents in various circuses from the 1870s until he retired in 1917. In July 1938, aged ninety-one, he was interviewed for the Federal Writers' Project on "Circus Days and Ways," and he explained the joys of the traveling life.

W. E. "Doc" Van Elstine, interviewed by A. C. Herbert in Portland, Oregon, and transcribed on January 13, 1939, for Oregon Folklore Studies, Federal Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration [American Memory: American Life Histories: Manuscripts From the Federal Writers' Project, 1936–1940, http://memory.loc.gov].

I been asked to draw a comparison between the circus of today and the circus of the past. Well, they just ain't no comparison. The circus in this day and age seems really to be the stupendous, gigantic, colossal exhibition the advance billing and the ''barkers,'' ''spielers,'' and ''grinders,'' claim for it. The oldtime circus was a puny forerunner of the mammoth aggregations now on the road. The circus your grandfather went to see as a boy, was nothin' more than a variety, or vaudeville, show under canvas. Pretty near all the acts they done in the circus could of been put on in even the ordinary theaters of that time. Could you imagine the Ringling Brothers' B[arnum &] B[ailey] show of today tryin' to squeeze itself into any theater, auditorium, or indoor arena in any town, say, like Portland?

The people who works for circuses today is all trained specialists. Everybody has

only one job, and he's supposed to do that one thing well. The oldtime trouper was a Jack-of-all-trades. He could shoe a horse, if he had to, he could clown, drive a ten-horse team, lay out canvas, and fill in at anything around the lot except perhaps aerial acrobatics, and believe it or not, many of the old-timers could even ''double'' in acrobatics.

The circus has always been one of the world's most progressive enterprises. New inventions, if they was something the circus could use, was grabbed up by the circus as soon as they come out. The circus was always away ahead of anybody else in lighting equipment. When stores and business places throughout the country was still using tallow dips for light, the circus was using calcium flares bright enough to almost blind you. The pressure gaslights used by circuses in the early part of this century was intensely brilliant by contrast with the dim, dinky lights of the average town the circus visited. Many small-town oldtimers will tell you they first saw Edison's marvelous incandescent lamps when some circus came to town.

Yes, the circus of today is bigger and better in every way than circuses was, even twenty-five years ago. But the kids of today ain't so wide-eyed and amazed at what they see at a circus as they was a quarter of a century ago. So many marvelous things goes on all the time in this day and age that kids probably expect more from a circus now than it's humanly possible to give.

In my more than a half century with circuses I worked on all the big shows one time or another. The circus has took me to the four corners of both hemispheres, and has give me many exciting experiences. I seen circuses miraculously missed by cyclones in the prairie states. When you're standin' in the middle of a couple million dollars' worth of circus equipment, it's always a thrill to see a blackish, greenish cloud with its trailing, death-dealing funnel, bearing down on your show. The 'stock' in the 'animal top' (menagerie tent) knows a storm is comin' same as you do. Makes you feel kind of funny in the pit of the stomach, to hear them snarl, howl, whine, bellow and roar as the storm gets nearer. They get nervous, testy, mean, and it all adds to the confusion on the lot.

MELODRAMA

In Stephen Crane's novel *Maggie* (1896), sensational drama offers life-enhancing make-believe as well as pleasing fantasy and forgetfulness. The evening's entertainment allows the poor seamstress to forget her drunken mother and the squalid tenement apartment in Rum Alley, and the day spent sewing cuffs and collars in the garment factory. Everyone in the cheap Bowery variety saloon responds enthusiastically to the dime-novel plot. Even the rogues watching "revolted from the pictured villainy," "hissed vice and applauded virtue" with "untiring zeal." More than a decade later the Progressive reformer Jane Addams labeled the neighborhood nickelodeon the "house of dreams" because it so captured the imagination of the young. In similar fashion, the cheap theater gave Maggie hope—"raised spirits" and "made her think"—that middle-class gentility might be within reach for a sweatshop machinist. This entertainment was not mere escapism: "To Maggie and the rest of the audience, this was transcendental realism."[1]

Melodrama was not the antithesis of realism; it included sufficient and sufficiently realistic details to make the narrative credible. According to the late-eighteenth-century formulation, it had originally been pantomime set to music. However, although music remained a signifier of emotional stress and dramatic tension in the nineteenth century, visual spectacle became the dominant strain. In the 1830s and 1840s, Thomas Hamblin, the English-born manager of the Bowery Theatre, introduced the popular songs, farces, and melodramatic plays of adventure that had proved so popular in London, but given contemporary relevance with flamboyant staging and lighting. Where novel blackface representations thrived, so did plays distantly European in origin but with an American accent. Authentic details of locale mattered.

What audiences expected was hyper-reality. "Common sense was not wanted in the highest level of melodrama," writes David Grimsted, "but rather something stylized, refined, elevated above the level of ordinary existence."[2] Melodrama suited an age of class conflict, of industrial capitalism, of sudden urbanization and the onset of a market economy, of evangelical religion and its armies of the damned and the almost-saved. Sin was generally

depicted as the product of character rather than circumstance. When self-help literature told of ascent from log cabin to White House and from the factory floor to business magnate, it taught that determined individuals, and not grand impersonal forces, lay behind such transformations. In frothy dime-novel romances of mill girls and millionaires or tramps and tycoons, Michael Denning has shown, "the pressure of the real persisted."[3] The more successful melodramas transported fairy-tale characters to recognizable local scenes stocked with familiar social types in a dramatic form that melded folk tale and modern saga.

Within melodrama there were class accents. The mainly working-class audiences of New York's Bowery and Chatham Theatres enjoyed action-packed scenes of emotional and physical conflict. Bruce McConachie has described these melodramas as "apocalyptic." Amid scenes of general catastrophe—fire, flood, shipwreck, massacre, all displayed graphically with every scenic effect in the producer's arsenal—the villain met divine retribution. Vengeance for past wrongs was inevitable. Heroes of sound republican virtue triumphed over villains and rescued helpless damsels in distress. John Augustus Stone's *Metamora, or The Last of the Wampanoags* (1828), where the doomed Indian chief bravely defended land, honor, and womanhood, was a platform for Edwin Forrest, the actor favored by the Bowery. Forrest moved, wrote a less-than-enthusiastic critic, with exaggerated physical vigor, with "a sudden entrance, impressive invocations to heaven, certain menacing falls of the brow, and numerous seizures of a sort of histrionic asthma or shortness of breath."[4]

The middle classes retreated to more salubrious dime museum lecture rooms. There were fewer thrilling chases in their favorite "sensation" plays of moral uplift, but vivid emotional turmoil. The temptation, ruin, and shame, and occasionally, reformation, of drunkards and slaveholders gave both diversion and reassurance. If virtuous individuals died, virtuous moral principle ascended triumphant. The best-known scene was the conclusion of George L. Aiken's dramatization of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, with appropriate symbolism in unmistakeably vast form: "Gorgeous clouds, tinted with sunlight. Eva, robed in white, is discovered on the back of a milk-white dove, with expanded wings, as if just soaring upwards. Her hands are extended in benediction over St. Clare and Uncle Tom, who are kneeling, and gazing up to her. Impressive music—Slow curtain."[5]

Melodrama was a study in contrasts. It depicted the extremes of emotion, rather than delicate shades and nuances. To many in the audience, awakened by revivals, Hell was a living reality, and sin, a vivid and ever-present temptation. They appreciated the stark alternatives posed of damnation or redemption. What mattered was action, energy, movement, plot, and not nice development of character. On stage, motivation was indicated by a code of

gestures that were part of the nineteenth-century actor's canon and understood by the audience. The villain was malevolent, often comic, sometimes foreign, brutal, and overbearing, and as black-hearted as his dress, or a sweet-talking seducer and roué disguised in the latest fashion. The heroine was a passive innocent, naïvely trusting in the sincerity of others, and, if saved from destruction, owed her salvation to the almost-divine intervention of those more worldly-wise.

In the popular media of the 1840s the modern metropolis was depicted as a site of moral conflict. Fact met fiction. In the largest Atlantic coast cities the Irish and German foreign-born and their children were a majority or near majority, and most native-born inhabitants were recent arrivals from the country. There seemed few certain landmarks, physical or moral, and few individuals experienced in city ways. Amid unprecedented change, the detective story, the new penny press, the pamphlets issued by the many reform agencies, and most of all, the cheap, sensational novels, exposed the horrors of crime and turpitude. English and American authors—G. M. W. Reynolds' *Mysteries of London* (1849) or George Lippard's lurid tales of the "Quaker City"—copied Eugène Sue's sensational style. George G. Foster's accounts of "sunshine and shadow" among the "upper ten thousand" and "lower million" of New York claimed to be based on direct observation of the dens and pits where dissolute high society joined in an unholy alliance with the disreputable many.

Sensational plays made tangible the moral panic about vice. Rich and debauched "sporting men," "swells," and "bloods" mingled with confidence men and devised cunning ploys to seduce, rob, and murder the innocent. Naïve greenhorns and country "rubes" and "jakes" were their natural prey. Appearances were deceptive, when these wolves in sheep's clothing were adept in disguising foul thoughts with fair words. Most at risk were young women who trusted the words of the sly deceiver, and who either trusted innocently or were tied by family obligations. Their natural protectors were the honest, low-comedy men of the lower classes. Mose, the Bowery B'hoy, the butcher and volunteer fireman, was the no-nonsense, street-wise, pugnacious defender of honor in Benjamin Baker's *A Glance at New York in 1848* and a dozen more plays. Also too shrewd to be hoodwinked by tricksters and charlatans were the plainly dressed, plain-speaking, country yokels, such as Adam Trueman in Anna Cora Mowatt's *Fashion* (1845), natural democrats, suspicious of privilege and dishonesty. With such stock characters, easily recognizable to the Bowery audiences, melodramas served as guidebooks through the bewildering chaos of the city.

Appreciation was robust, genteel etiquette ignored. In industrial Pittsburgh, James Parton saw an all-male audience, scrubbed clean after duty in the iron mills, ignoring the management's signs for politeness. During the

program of farces, comic songs, and chorus-line dancing, "the people would keep up such a roar of laughter, that for many seconds at a time not a word could be heard from the stage."[6] Nineteenth-century audiences went to the theater expecting to be moved physically as well as emotionally. Phrenology and psychology taught that there was an intimate connection between the outer body and the inner mind, between appearance and character, between action and intention. What was required was experience and knowledge in interpreting the signs. The task of the talented actor was to convey by appropriate gesture those signs of motivation to the audience, and in the popular theater at least, for appreciative response of jeers or tears. The interaction of the interpretative actor and sympathetic spectator was robust, open, and physically exuberant.

In Charles M. Sheldon's *In His Steps* (1896), wealthy Felicia is already troubled in conscience by Calvin Bruce's sermon, but an English melodrama about the London poor prompts her to deeper thought about Chicago. The scenery depicting the pauper's hovel was "almost too realistic" and she "found herself living those scenes over and over." Sister Rose was less convinced:

> "But the slum scene was horrible. I think they ought not to show such things in a play. They are too painful."
>
> "They must be painful in real life, too," replied Felicia.
>
> "Yes, but we don't have to look at the real thing. It's bad enough at the theater where we pay for it."[7]

Years before, Herman Melville explained why fantastic exaggerations of the everyday appealed. In an interlude in *The Confidence-Man* he anticipated criticisms that his central character, the mysterious and ambiguous cosmopolitan, was too unreal to be believed. More liberal readers of fiction, he explained, "with that unreserve permitted to the stage . . . look not only for more entertainment, but at bottom, even for more reality, than real life can show. . . . Thus, though they want novelty, they want nature too, but nature unfettered, exhilarated, in effect transformed." Like melodrama, fiction transcended reality: "it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie."[8]

After the Civil War, confrontations on stage were less elaborate. Gone were galloping horses, pirate ships, fights with brigands and highwaymen—or at least on the same grand scale. The plays of Dion Boucicault and Augustin Daly in the 1870s and 1880s had thrilling adventures and near disasters, but the plots tended to be more credible and the narrative more fully developed. The last flowering of the melodrama came with the "ten-twenty-thirty" theaters in the two decades before World War One. As well as low prices and frequent change of program, impresarios like Corse Payton at Brooklyn's Lee Avenue offered inducements—receptions, souvenirs, and for the women of

the neighborhood who were a third of the audience, an annual baby show and a nursery.

One of the innovations was the "tabloid drama," the one-act play popular as a vaudeville turn. What was remarkable, reported Hartley Davis, was that "realism is not successful. Audiences want something apart from the routine of their own lives." The plays involved commonplace characters in sensational exploits. Critic Harry James Smith found the Thalia's melodramas overwrought but lively, compared with Broadway's pale creations. What the "shop girls" and their "steadies" enjoyed, he noted, was the gamut of emotions, however implausible and bewildering the plot. "The melodrama," he concluded, "is full of comedy; it is sure to follow every scene of pathos or violence."[9] When theatrical syndicates were at their peak, the Stair-Havlin group had thirty-five houses across the country where touring "combination" companies presented a different melodrama weekly. Numerous repertory tent shows also visited small towns offering scaled-down versions of popular plays. The cheap-theater market proved intensely competitive. Always challenged by vaudeville and musical comedy, by 1910 the ten-twenty-thirty theaters faced the threat of the new nickelodeons recast as grand "palaces." When movie producers switched from documentary realism to dramatic fiction, the melodrama theaters were too expensive to operate. In 1924 the experienced journalist Marian Spitzer reported on the cheap theater's demise. The revival of the old favorite, Theodore Kremer's *Fatal Wedding, or, the Little Mother*, which had run for years in the Bowery, failed after only eight performances. Movie melodramas had triumphed over melodramatic theater.[10]

A Plea for an American Drama

The novelist James Kirke Paulding was one of the most passionate advocates for a drama celebrating American nationality. He was stung by the jibes of British commentators like the Rev. Sydney Smith that the new republic lacked cultural achievement of note, and wrote the satirical *Diverting History of John Bull and Brother Jonathan* (1812). Others looked to literature, but Paulding also had high hopes for the theater as a moral and intellectual force, and he spurned both spineless deference to English traditions and absurd, sensationalist, crowd-pleasing melodrama. Later, his comedy *The Lion of the West* (1830) cast as hero, good-natured frontiersman Nimrod Wildfire chiding English snobs and their servile American imitators.

[James Kirke Paulding,] "American Drama," *American Quarterly Review* 1 (June 1827): 332, 333–34, 336, 338, 356.

Of all popular amusements ever devised, dramatic exhibitions are, when properly conducted, the most elegant and instructive. They address themselves both to the

understanding and the senses, and carry with them the force of precept and example. In witnessing them, we are excited by the passions of others instead of our own. . . .

It is by this mode of giving play and excitement to the mind, by mimic representations, that the force of the operations of the passions in real life, is unquestionably tempered and restrained; and hence it has always been held with justice, that the stage, in its legitimate and proper state, is a most powerful agent in humanizing and refining mankind. It operates also in other ways in bringing about this salutary result. It allures the people from an attendance upon barbarous and brutifying spectacles—from brawls, boxing-matches, and bull-baitings;—it accustoms them, in a certain degree, to intellectual enjoyments and rational recreations; and substitutes innocent amusement, if not actual instruction, in the place of those which afford neither one nor the other. A theatre, where the price of admittance is within the means of the ordinary classes of the people, is a substitute, and a most salutary one, for tavern brawls and low debauchery. Those whose faculties are too obtuse to relish or comprehend the intrinsic excellence of a plot, the lofty morality or classic ease of the dialogue, are still instructed and amused through the medium of their eyes, and actually see before them examples to imitate or avoid. If it be said, that these examples are too removed from the ordinary sphere of those who witness them, to be of any use, still it may be replied, that chastity, fortitude, patriotism, and magnanimity, are virtues of all classes of mankind, and that all can feel and comprehend them, though they may be exercised in circumstances and situations in which they never expected to be placed. . . .

It is generally, we believe, considered a sufficient apology in behalf of the persons who preside over this most delightful of all intellectual banquets, that the degradation of the stage originated in the necessity of administering to a taste already vitiated. The public must be pleased, that the manager may live. If the people require the attractions of a menagerie and a puppet-show combined, and will relish nothing living, but horses, dogs, dromedaries, and elephants, prancing in the midst of pasteboard pageantry, conflagrations, bombardments, springing of mines, blowing up of castles, and such like accumulations of awful nursery horrors, it is alleged that there is no help for it. The taste must be gratified, like the appetites of other animals that chance to prefer raw meat, and offals, to the highest delicacies of the table. This may be true to a certain extent; but we are, notwithstanding, satisfied in our own judgment, that it is very materially in the power of the managers of theatres, to give a better direction to the public taste; and that it would eventually lead to the most profitable results, were they to take equal pains and incur equal expense, to cater for a good taste, that they do to pamper a bad one.

We are quite sure, that a theatre, devoted to the exhibition of none but legitimate dramas, in the hands of competent actors, would prove permanently attractive; rally around it almost all the more enlightened portions of society, and, by a natural consequence, all the inferior classes; and finally prove far more profitable to the manager than one devoted to expensive spectacles, one of which costs more to get up than a dozen first-rate tragedies and comedies. If one-half of the sums laid out on paste-

board, tinsel, and trumpery, were offered as a premium for good actors, a first-rate company might be collected, permanently, and fully adequate to give effect to the finest efforts of the dramatist. There would then be no necessity to depend on perpetual novelty, which supplies the place of good acting; and perpetual shows substituted for the beautiful creations of genius. . . .

We are therefore of opinion, that no small portion of this bad taste which we deplore, in relation to the stage, may be fairly laid to the charge of managers, who, if we mistake not, have been at least accomplices in producing that very state of things which they now offer as an apology for persevering the same course by which it was brought about. . . .

The perpetual exhibition of shows, possessing no other merit but that of imitating or rather caricaturing nature most vilely, has by degrees rendered the more refined classes of society quite indifferent to the stage. . . .

Another reason, probably, why so few writers attempt the stage of late, is the utter hopelessness of seeing justice done to their productions by the actors. Large as are our modern theatres, they can accommodate but one good performer at a time. . . . Only one sun can blaze in the heavens; and but one *star,* of all the galaxy of stars, can display its nightly glories, and twinkle us blind, at the theatres. If it should, therefore, unfortunately happen, that the author has developed more than one character in his piece, which requires something beyond the ordinary talent of a candle-snuffer to personate, it will almost inevitably happen that the piece is condemned. The really good actors belonging to the company, are kept in reserve, while the *star* is exhibiting its splendours; or if brought forward at all, are condemned to toil through their parts neglected and unapplauded, while the course of the *star,* however wayward and eccentric, is hailed with shouts of admiration. . . .

By the prevalence of this absurd vanity on the part of actors, and the equally absurd credulity of the public, our theatres are deprived of any permanent attractions other than those of gorgeous spectacles, prodigious dancers, and prodigious wild beasts. . . .

The want of a National Drama is the first thing that strikes us in this inquiry. By a national drama, we mean, not merely a class of dramatic productions written by Americans, but one appealing directly to the national feelings; founded upon domestic incidents—illustrating or satirizing domestic manners—and, above all, displaying a generous chivalry in the maintenance and vindication of those great and illustrious peculiarities of situation and character, by which we are distinguished from all other nations. . . .

We have no peculiar language to create an identity of our own; and it must, in a great measure, be in its apt and peculiar application to ourselves, our situation, character, government and institutions, that our literature would seem destined to become national. . . .

This land is full of materials—such as novelty of incident, character, and situation. Like the forests of our country which have never been cut down, those materials

remain unemployed and unexhausted—fresh and novel, with all the bold features of primeval strength and vigour. It only requires a brave, original intellect to convert them into the materials of excellence. It has been often imagined as one of the obstacles which stand in the way of a national drama, that we lack variety in our national character. No idea, we think, can possibly be more erroneous than this. There is, probably, no country in the world, which affords more numerous and distinct characters than the United States. Our cities are full of bipeds from every quarter of the old world, bringing with them all their peculiarities, to be exhibited in a new sphere. From the city on the sea-side, to the frontier settler—from him to the white hunter, more than half savage—to the savage himself—there are continual gradations in the characters and situation of mankind; and every state in the Union is a little world by itself, exhibiting almost the same degrees of difference that we observe in the English, the Scotch, and the Irish. Their manners, habits, occupations, prejudices, and opinions, are equally various and dissimilar. For these reasons, we believe that there is no want of sufficient varieties of character in the United States, to afford ample materials for a diversified drama. . . . But even conceding, for one moment only, that complaints of a want of variety of character are just; still no one will deny, that there is an abundant field for novelty of situation; and novelty of situation is the best possible substitute for novelty of character, if it does not in reality create it. . . .

The first requisite for producing a National Drama is national encouragement. We do not mean pensions and premiums—but liberal praise and rewards to success—and a liberal allowance for failures. The second, is a little more taste and liberality in the managers of our theatres; and the third, is the presence of competent performers, collected in companies of sufficient strength to give effectual support to a new piece, and sufficient talent to personate an original character, without resorting to some hacknied model, which has descended from generation to generation, and like all copies, lost something of the original in the hands of each succeeding imitator.

Classic Melodrama

Charlotte Cushman became the leading tragic actress of her day. As a beginning professional, she wrote a short story for fashionable *Godey's Lady's Book* magazine in 1837. In chapter 1, the innocent Leoline learns of her father's fate and her brother's unwillingness to assist mother and sister; as her mother tells her, this is "but one page in the volume of earthly selfishness, now spread open before you, and from which I fear you will have to learn much that will cast a blight upon your advancing years." The fiction was partly autobiographical. Charlotte, too, in an age when women in the theater had a low reputation, took to the stage to support her mother when her apparently wealthy father died suddenly and in debt. Charlotte, too, had an unhappy love match from which she never recovered emotionally. The style, the plot, and the sentiments of the story are archetypically melodramatic.

Charlotte S. Cushman, "The Actress," *Godey's Lady's Book* 14 (February 1837): 70–73.

"How little do they see what is, who frame
Their hasty judgment upon that which seems."

The world teems with painted misery—the misery that banquets upon the heart yet is not written upon the brow, and which goes forth into society, robed in the drapery of joy, wearing a smile for the gay, and bland words of content and peace wherewith to mislead the curious.

Happy are they who can thus make the features the defensive barriers, behind which their griefs may be screened from vulgar observation; and by a system of excusable moral deception, ply jest and song, while over the bruised sensibilities of the soul, is pouring a lava-like flood of bitter anguish, scorching the affections of the heart, and making the brain whirl with the tortures of its pent up agony.

All may not thus play a part so foreign to their inward emotions, and gild the shattered column of hope with the mellow hues of peace; but there are some spirits so constituted, as to wreathe the lip with smiles, even when despair battens upon its fibres, and dissemble with well set phrase, when impertinence seeks to lift the Mokanna veil, and read the heart's language in its naked outpourings. There are some few who can school themselves thus, but however well the mummery prospers, yet, within, the strife is fiercer and more destructive than it would be, if the confined agonies could gain an outlet through the parched channels of the eye, or waste away in the cold calculating medium of words. To borrow the strong language of Bryon—

Full many a stoic eye and aspect stern
Mask hearts where grief hath little left to learn,
And many a withering thought lies hid, not lost
In smiles that least befit, who wears them most.

To such minds, so organized, and embodying all that may darken the horizon of life, and nothing to chase away for a moment its gloom, happiness ever wears a negative aspect, while sorrow looms frowningly over every hope, rendering the past a type of the future—the present rayless, and futurity ominous and to be feared.—With them the joy of to-day is rendered valueless by the uncertainty that enwraps the morrow, and they fear to quaff from the goblet of human affections lest the compounds of subsequent suffering are contained in its lees.—Dating the disease of the imagination from the experience which is gained in battling with early misfortune, the mind rarely, if ever, recovers from the shock it sustains, and intellect, hope, too often reason itself, fall into ruins, leaving the victim of a perverse destiny, the choice of incurring the world's scorn, by the open expression of misfortune, or of learning to govern the features and enacting a mask in the great revel of human folly.

But there are moments when the mask will drop off, and the too highly excited sensibilities refuse obedience to the artificial mechanism that directs them; then is the moment when speculation may resolve itself into certainty, and the gazer may

read in fact, what has long been surmised, learning in an hour of agonized confidence, what will teach a more correct lesson than a century's examination of the drilled visage could impart. It is then that the sufferer renounces for a brief while the actor's part, and vents the surcharged feelings of the heart to any who may be disposed to become the recipient.

From such a source have I drawn the story of Leoline, and an apology would be offered for the seeming violation of confidence did not the mantle of the grave enshroud the breathless form of her, concerning whom my tale. . . .

CHAPTER II

'Tis not immortals to command success;
But we'll do more, Sempronius, we'll deserve it.

The performance was ''King Lear,'' kindly chosen by the manager, as being calculated by the stirring character of its several heroines, to give encouragement to the new actress during this, her first appearance. She personated the youngest daughter of Lear.

_____ poured forth its hundreds to witness the *debut* of her, whose presence they had so often greeted under other and brighter auspices. The vast building was thronged with the young and beautiful, and faces well remembered met the agitated vision of Leoline, as from the ''wings'' she stole a furtive glance at the features of those, who but a few months since, had hailed her their associate, and welcomed her coming in their social circles. Her bosom throbbed painfully as she surveyed their countenances, where selfish curiosity shone conspicuous. But when her eye wandered to another part of the theatre, and she noticed her callous-hearted brother, and a group of equally unprincipled relatives, a change came over her spirit, nerving it to brave unflinchingly the ordeal through which she was about to pass.

''They shall not witness my failure,'' she murmured; ''that were too much—no, here at least I will strive to curtail their selfish triumph.'' A smile flitted across the blanched cheek of the proud girl, and the bitterness that had, up to this hour, wrung her heart, passed away. At this moment a hurried step was heard, and her mother gazed enquiringly into her face.

''Fear not, mother,'' she said, ''I am calm,'' and she joined the royal pageant as it moved across the stage, pacing some gay saloon, herself its mistress. Every eye was riveted upon her. She *felt* this, but wavered not; a hum of mingled voices struck upon her now acutely gifted ear; but she only nerved herself the more effectually to enunciate calmly, and with precision, her answer to the silly question of the dotard monarch, as he turned to her. As she progressed, a profound silence reigned over the spacious building, and when, ere learning the presence of her imperious sisters, she addressed to them the taunting language of the immortal bard; there was a withering sarcasm in her words, a dash of bitter, heart spoken feeling in her tones, that found a shaming

echo in the breasts of her callous kindred. She felt that she had triumphed, and as she disappeared behind the scenes there arose a deafening shout of approbation, loud, fervent and long.

The Rubicon was passed, and the career of Leoline promised now to prove as unclouded and brilliant as its opening had seemed lowering. Gifted in the intellectual accomplishments of her sex, she found in the profession she had chosen many congenial spirits; and keenly relishing the society of the talented, the leisure moments she enjoyed were passed with the brilliant, though sometimes faulty members of the dramatic corps of the Theatre of _____, which, at that time, and in fact ever since, numbered among its components, some high-minded and intellectual spirits.

No sorrows of a pecuniary nature weighed upon her sensitive mind; her mother was in a state, if not affluent, at least beyond want—the public regarded her with warm feelings of esteem; she was respected by her fellow labourers in the dramatic vineyard. Even they, the haughty members of her own family, who had left her to struggle with misfortune alone and unfriended, were now disposed to extend the hand of social friendship, but indignant at the meanness of their present motives, and painfully alive to their past heartlessness, she passed over with contemptuousness their overtures for a reconciliation.

I say that the career of Leoline *promised* to be brilliant, but one false step—one fatal act of indiscretion again dashed from her lips the cup of happiness, and gave a colouring of woe to the years that remained to her on earth. Constituted as the mind of Leoline was, even the excitement of her present life left a void in her bosom which required filling up with something having more power to tranquilize than force the already strained energies of her character, and it was not to be wondered that some one, from the number who knelt in homage before the beautiful actress, should captivate a heart, eminently endowed with those imaginative fancies which give to love in the spring time of life a romantic and seemingly eternal youth. Experience had taught Leoline to despise those whose perfidy had been revealed by the agency of circumstances; but yet she had not learned the policy, so essential to the young, of weighing well the character of those around, before she reposed confidence in their lip eloquence. And when there came one, who, ardent and imaginative himself, spoke his admiration in terms sincere and respectful, she fondly [foolishly] listened and believed. She fondly hoped that now she should realize the fervent aspirations of her girlhood, and as imagination stretched its deluded eye over the broad, the boundless, and in appearance, unclouded future, a new divinity took possession of her heart, and all guileless and enthusiastic she responded to her lover with a tear in her eye which had in it nothing of sorrow—

> And all the burning tongues the passions teach
> Found *in that tear* the best interpreter!

She was won! Alas, poor Leoline!

CHAPTER III

Man's love is of man's life, a thing apart'
'Tis woman's whole existence

Almost with the transition of a drama did the history of Leoline please in incident. We have seen her supporting, with patient resignation, the defeat of all her hopes, when death snatched away her father, and the success that crowned her exertions upon the boards of _____ theatre, changed not her feelings. We now behold her at her bridal, giving her young and unsullied heart, with its priceless affections to one, who seemed too mercurial to estimate aright the responsibility he was assuming. But no doubts hung their gloomy drapery around her as she now plighted her faith and gave her hand to him who had won her heart. She trusted fully and implicitly, and the light of love and truth gleamed from her soft eye, extorting from all who gazed upon her the exclamations of ''how beautiful.''

*****

Twelve months passed—in Love's Calendar scarce a day—yet the young wife thought she could see in the demeanour of her spouse some indications of indifference. Volatile and heedless, he disliked the quiet joys of home, and plunged recklessly into dissipation; yet his apologies for a time served to lull her fears. Any pretext, no matter how groundless, will serve the trusting heart for a place of safety, whereon to rest the ark of Hope, and Leoline gauging her husband's affections by her own, relied upon their unchangeableness with a tenacity which gives fresh energies to the shipwrecked seaman so long as he has a single plank between him, and the yawning wave. Well and truly has the wayward author of Don Juan written,

Alas! the love of woman! It is known
To be a lovely and a fearful thing.

Slight, however, was the thread upon which she suspended her hopes, and each progressive day gave her doubts wider range. She read that in her husband's glance that told volumes to her sorrowing heart, and as if to dash away the last, the only pillar of consolation, he, with the habits of a bacchanal, also associated the tone, and treated her with coarse and unfeeling rudeness. In vain her remonstrances—vainer still her tears. The brute passion of the wretched man were too strong to bow before the arguments she would advance, and even when she drove him to reflection by the magic which woman can so powerfully exert, when love prompts, and truth sanctifies the motive, he would resort again to the wine-cup, and drown his reason in the inebriating element.

The delusion was over, and all feebly did the heart of Leoline strive against the sweeping tide of misery that poured over her long cherished images of hope and joy.

It was a pleasant, but too brief dream, from which she was now fully awakened, and the bitterness of her present situation was only exceeded by the dark vista that lay spread out in the future. To live with the degraded wretch who had violated every

claim to her respect, was to subject herself to continual insult, without the remotest hope of ever reclaiming him from error, yet to forsake him would, she well knew, open the floodgate of calumny, and expose her to the censures of the unfeeling and misjudging. Long and doubtful was the conflict in the bosom of the sorrowing wife, but a fresh outrage from him, whose conduct gave rise to her sorrow, at length determined her as to the line of conduct she should pursue, and with a heavy heart, she, with her grief-worn parent, quitted the roof, under which she had spent so many checquered hours.

Fourteen months had passed since she quitted the stage, and again she was announced as about to appear.

CHAPTER IV

Dryden has truly observed—

The noisy praise
Of the giddy crowds is unchangeable as winds.

For so in most cases will be found the applause of those, who, governed partly by the impulse of the moment, praise in one breath, and condemn in the next.

Our heroine experienced this in its fullest and most withering sense; for although she had retired from the theatre of her dramatic glory, followed by the regrets of all, yet none of those marked ebullitions of popular esteem, which gratify the professional pride of the performer, greeted her return to the boards.

It was evident to all that the spirit which had characterized her formerly was gone; there seemed no desire to please, and when, in the course of her engagement, it was required that she should personate the gay Rosalind, in "As You Like It," there seemed something in her tones, strangely at variance with the jesting arrangement of the sentences, while her laughter contrasted singularly with the melancholy that hung upon her brow. A feeling of awe pervaded the spectators; no note of approbation came from their midst, and all who felt interested in her success, judged truly that the terrible struggle she made to appear composed were in themselves sufficient to defeat that object. The struggle proved too great for her agitated nerves, and when the curtain fell, she sank senseless upon the stage, and was thence borne delirious to her chamber.

Weeks elapsed before she again appeared, and all were surprised at the change that had been effected in her demeanour. Gay, almost to frivolity, she seemed the divinity of mirth, sporting in the enjoyment of hope and joy, without aught in the past to sadden her memory, nor a single cloud in the Heaven of the present. There was one, however, who read the heart of Leoline better than did they who gleaned their opinion from the external appearance of the gay and lively actress. That one was her mother, whose solicitude was fearfully excited by these strange symptoms in the condition of her child. And often in the silent watches of the night would she sit and tremble, as from the lips of Leoline, in her feverish slumbers, there would burst a torrent of anguished, frenzied expressions, telling too plainly the tortures her mind

endured. The sleeper's fancy would roam away to the golden moments of the past, ransacking the caves of memory, bringing thence all that was bright and beautiful; and then, ere she had time to heap them together, would come a change over the character of her dream, and the laugh would die upon her lips, her brow would contract, as though the Sirocco's breath had passed over it, while from her wedged teeth, a stifled moan of sorrow would come forth, sounding upon the mother's ear like a dirge, and then she would start up, and collecting her faculties, chide her parent playfully for not taking some repose. In concert—coterie—or upon the stage, would she exert herself to please, with such winning grace, that loud bursts of applause would follow. And she could retire from the gay pageant, leaving the impression upon the minds of all, that she had outlived the remembrances of the dark incidents in her life's history. Little did they imagine, who thus surmised, that within her bosom despair had erected his throne, and reigned sole sovereign, that the joyous tones she uttered came not from the heart; and that even when she seemed the queen of mirth, woe was eating away the chords of life, and hurrying her passage to the sepulchre, for the quiet repose of which she panted, as does the weary pilgrim in the desert thirst after the cool spring and branching palm-tree. But this contest of the mind could not last. The mental energies were too strained, and the physical powers bent beneath the weight of the mind's cares.

Why lengthen out this true yet mournful story. She died ere twenty summers had kissed her brow, yet the chill of three-score winters could not have wrought a more withering lesson upon a form and features where beauty had stamped its choicest and loveliest proportions. She hailed the approach of the grim conqueror with joy, at a period in life when others first launch the bark of life upon the great ocean of circumstances; but misfortune had forced her out upon the waves, and the hopes of her girlish years—the love of her womanhood were all wrecked and sent back upon her heart stripped of their gay streamers. The grave was to her a resting place, and her last words to the heart broken parent, who watched her dying couch, testified that her only regret was in leaving that parent to the further endurance of a life of affliction.

Poor Leoline! The grass watered by the tears of the few who still cherish thy memory has scarcely grown upon thy humble grave, yet in the minds of the thousands who once knew thee as endowed with genius and worth, far superior to the general order, thou art forgotten, and thy name never mentioned by the kindred who forsook thee in life, and left thee to pass over the dark isthmus that divides Time from Eternity, without expressing a single regret at thy untimely demise!

For twenty years, Walt Whitman wrote brief wide-ranging essays on urban life for Brooklyn newspapers. Among his favorite subjects were the drama and popular literature, and in 1858 he commented on the melodramatic imagination that linked the two. The *New York Atlas* (for which Barnum wrote letters during his European tour in the 1840s) and Robert Bronner's best-selling *New York Ledger* weekly were the publications Whitman had in mind.

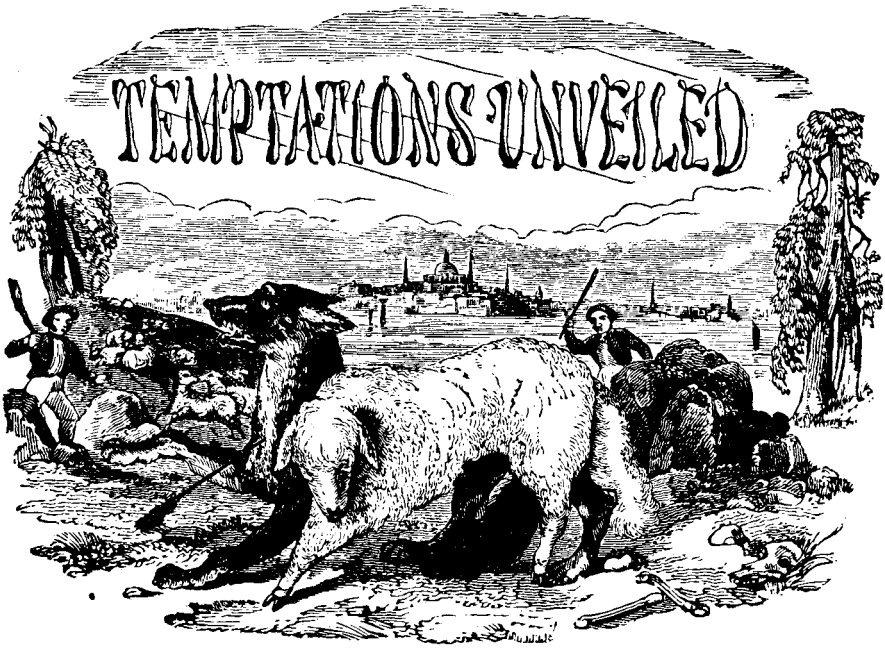
Walt Whitman, Brooklyn *Daily Times*, December 13, 1858, in *The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*, , 2 vols., ed. Emory Holloway (New York: Doubleday, 1922), 2:19–20.

They are immense in blood and thunder romances with alliterative titles and plots of startling interest.—These stories are curious productions in their way, and the cultivated reader on the lookout for amusement may enjoy a hearty laugh at any time over such sanguinary tales as the ''Bloody Burglar of Babylon''; the ''Maniac Maiden's Fate''; or the ''Red-Headed Ragamuffin's Revenge.'' All these unique publications have second and often third titles of the most mysterious, thrilling, harrowing and altogether insane description—calculated to impress the uninitiated reader with awe and to inflame his curiosity for the ''coming events'' that cast such portentous shadows before. These things are to literature what the Bowery melodramas are to the stage, and are read by the same class that would hang with rapture over the latter. When the pirate chief drinks the blood of his victims in the largest of gory goblets, and with a burst of savage laughter flings the cup at the head of his trembling prisoner, the appreciative newsboy who reads the eloquent account is impelled to shout ''Hi! Hi!'' in a transport of enthusiasm. When the virtuous young mechanic rescues the lovely but unhappy milliner's apprentice from the base violence of the fast young aristocrat, what delight thrills the reader's breast! When the heroine has been stolen in infancy from her Fifth Avenue father, who is possessed of princely wealth, and when in chapter the last, after years of unheard-of privations, she is at length restored to the paternal arms, what Sunday-paper lover of any sensibility but must feel a sympathetic throb when that venerable man falls upon her breast in a burst of confidence and a shower of tears, and ejaculates:—''Ke-ind Heaven, I thank thee!—it is—it is indeed my long-lost che-ild!''

To say the truth, these publications, which obtained the *acme* of their popularity in the *Ledger* are not the choicest in composition or conception of plot and character, but after all, we doubt very much whether the outcry raised against them in some quarters is sustained by common sense. It may be said with tolerable safety that a large proportion of the admirers of this kind of literature might do worse if debarred from the enjoyment of their favorite mental *pabulum*. . . . The public for whom these tales are written require strong contrasts, broad effects and the fiercest kind of ''intense'' writing generally.

William B. English specialized in writing inexpensive, paperbound, sensational novels for the Boston publishers Redding and Company. *Rosina Meadows* had themes similar to *Gertrude Howard, The Maid of Humble Life; or, Temptation Resisted* (1843), *Morton, or Smiles and Tears; a Story of the Past and Present* (1845), and *Hazards of the Heart; or, Woman's Wrongs, and Woman's Revenge* (1840s). The introduction summarized the plot.

William B. English, *Rosina Meadows, The Village Maid: or, Temptations Unveiled. A Story of City Scenes and Every Day Life* (Boston: Redding , 1843), [2], 3–4, 21–22, 32.



The frontispiece of William W. English's sensational novel, *Rosina Meadows, the Village Maid: or, Temptations Unveiled. A Story of City Scenes and Every Day Life* (1843), announced its theme: the danger of the wolf in sheep's clothing.

"Vice is a monster of such hideous mien,
That to be HATED, needs but to be SEEN."

The story of ROSINA MEADOWS is one of *real life,* and it has been the aim of the author to illustrate in her career the numerous *temptations, snares and trials* of the city, which beset the path of the young and unsophisticated maiden, on her first setting out upon the journey of life. In lifting the veil from the tempter, and his subtle and seductive arts, care has been taken to "hold the mirror up to nature," and to exhibit vice in its proper forms and colors, without introducing any thing exceptionable to the reader. The beginning shows *Virtue* in all her transcendent loveliness, and the end exhibits *Vice* in its most "hideous mien," thus showing how *to obtain the one* and *shun the other*.

The scenes and incidents portrayed in this volume are no ideal pictures, and the author has endeavored as far as possible, to divest them of the garb of fiction or other extraneous matter. It is believed that the utility of works of this character cannot be questioned by the most rigid moralist, when he reflects that the impressions formed in youth exercise a powerful influence over the character for life. The bloom and beauty of virtue lasts through all declining years; and if this volume be the means of

unveiling the temptations to those who would deviate from the path of duty and honor, and pointing out to them the way of virtue, ''whose ways are pleasantness, and whose paths are peace,'' then will his labors be well repaid. . . .

The narrator finds the village maiden:

A short cut through a thicket, and two or three scrambles up hill and through dale, brought me to a stile in front of the cottage. And here, reader, let us pause for a few moments to view the scene before us. The sun is bathing the eastern horizon with a sea of gold and silver, and all Nature is awakening once more in her freshness and beauty; the air is balmy, fragrant with flowers, over which it steals so softly as scarcely to disturb the gathering dew. . . .

And the cottage how beautiful it looks; like a dimple set in the midst of Nature's loveliness. . . . A short distance from the cottage door was a bower, formed by the branches of a tree, neatly united by ribbands and trellised around by running vines. . . . The cows and sheep were browsing in the meadow and gamboling about as happily as Nature herself. As far off as the eye could reach, was the village church with its old, weather-beaten spire, rising almost as high as the trees that surrounded it, and in the lap of a valley, near it, was the school-house and play-ground which stood there as the proud temple of Minerva, and the landmark of the village. . . .

A thousand pleasant, happy thoughts took possession of my mind, while under the magic influence of the scene before me; and every thing I saw, showed that happiness and contentment crowned the little cottage and its domain with their smiles. I began involuntarily to hum ''Home, sweet home,'' aloud. . . .

How shall I describe her—how picture to the mind that gentle-eyed, confiding creature that stood before me, . . . sent from the paradise of love? No painting could express her beauty—it dwelt not alone in her face,—in her ruby lips, her rosy cheeks, full of the flush and glow of health, in the magic glances of her bright eyes, or her glossy ringlets, that fell luxuriantly over her pure, transparent neck, wooing the gentle zephyrs as they passed. It was not alone in her graceful form and elastic step, but it enshrined her person with that inherent purity of mind and thought, formed by the honest impulses of nature. That fairy spot, far away from the turmoil of the world, and the sordid dominions and empty pageantry of fashion, had been her constant dwelling-place; and each of those familiar and delightful scenes had tranquillized her life, and imparted to her existence all its ripening charms.

Rosina seeks her fortune in Boston and is betrayed and abandoned by the wealthy libertine Harry Mendon. Falsely accused of prostitution, she is sentenced to the House of Correction. Afterward, her low reputation deprives her of honest work, and, pregnant, when she can find no assistance from Mendon's family, she turns to "that vice which had been her ruin."

No female ever plunged precipitately into the gulf of vice—she is led on step by step, lured progressively to the monster until her ruin is complete. . . . The libertine who invades the happy and peaceful fireside, and pollutes the fair shrine of female innocence with the impure emanations of his heart, who betrays a poor trusting and affectionate girl—robs the kind parent of their beloved daughter, in whom is concentrated the only cheering hope of their old age, and leaves them to weep over the ruin he has made, is again welcomed by the world—his dark and wicked deeds are attributed to youthful folly, and are soon forgotten. But how dreadful is the lot of the victim of his base designs—she is shunned, degraded and lost forever. The situation of a young and friendless girl, is indeed a sad one.—Her path in life is continually surrounded by the numerous temptations to sin which society is filled with—every step she takes is strewed with snares, each of which is filled with perils and ills, and if she errs it is human—it is often the error of circumstances, not the error of the heart. . . . Could those who witness with indifference the gradual downfall of a young and beautiful girl, once full of constancy and truth, once beloving and beloved, whose only fault is that she ''loved not wisely but too well,'' and was wronged and betrayed in an unguarded hour, could they see her pining away in sorrow, the flower of her youth wasting under a cold world's scorn and contumely—avoided and despised by her own sex, a scoff and a by-word to the most depraved of man—treated by every one as though all sense and feeling were extinct in their breast—the cruel, bitter tongue of slander magnifying her errors in every breath, and her heart scorching and riven with every word of reproach, could they but witness her struggles in this dreadful sea of agony—see her grasping with a woman's earnest power at every new hope that breaks before her, that she might again regain her good name with the world; struggling every moment to protect those remaining barriers of her honor, until the heart grows sick—her spirits become wearied and exhausted, and the waters of affliction close over each hope forever, how different would be the course pursued. . . .

Harry wastes his fortune in drunken gambling and is imprisoned for life for armed robbery. After various escapes, Rosina commits suicide, and the city watchman discovers her.

Rosina opened her glassy eyes, but oh, how horrible and vacant was their glance. Her pale, thin lips, relaxed slightly, and bending his ear to them, he heard her say—''Mother, dear Mother,—I come—God forgive me—my child—dying—cold—dying—oh! oh! dy—.'' She could utter no more—the poison had stopped forever the river of life;—a slight tremor shook her thin worn body,—and her head fell back powerless. Her features were still calm as the unclouded sky of summer, but oh!, how white and wasted! Those once bright and laughing eyes, were now glazed and fixed in the seal of death; that form, which was once so full of grace and beauty, and cheered all hearts with its presence was now so worn, and stiffened, and cold,—those lips which had so often pressed a fond father's and mother's cheek, and gave utterance to the pure

thought, that like a spirit of light dwelt within her heart—were now closed forever, and the poor, wronged, degraded, fallen, and crushed soul, that so lately dwelt upon them, had fled from its mortal clay, and gone before the God that gave it. . . .

Thus perished Rosina Meadows—her career on earth was short, as are the days of the wicked, and full of bitterness, and may her sad end prove a warning to her sex, in the hour of temptation.

Charles H. Saunders was a jobbing playwright and actor who compiled more than fifty melodramas. He adapted *Rosina Meadows* for the stage as soon as the novel was published. It proved exceptionally popular, and played for two months continuously at Frank Chanfrau's New National Theatre in 1849, in Barnum's American Museum in 1851, and in the National Theatre in Boston. In the preface to the play, published a dozen years after it was first performed, Saunders conceded that it was not a literary masterpiece, but an "effective acting piece," because "the incidents are local, the characters real, and not too highly colored." He retained much of English's dialogue, but greatly simplified the plot and added Jethro, the simple, good-natured, low-comedy Yankee who goes to Boston to sell his anti-appetite pills to the city slickers. The synopsis outlines the plot.

Rosina Meadows, the Village Maid; or, Temptations Unveiled. A Local Domestic Drama in three acts. As originally performed at the National Theatre, Boston, with extraordinary success. Adapted by Charles H. Saunders, from the popular novel of that name by Wm. B. English (New York: Samuel French, n.d. [1855–60]), [iii], 9, 11, 14–15, 17–18, 25–26, 40, 43–44, 45–46, 51–52.

ACT I

Opening chorus—"In merry, merry May." Preparations for the May-day festival. Arrival of Harry Mendon. The city spark and the Yankee girl. Chivalric spirit of Jethro. The unconscious father folds the serpent to his bosom. The village maid. The first encounter. Rustic meal; the father's warning; the libertine's resolve. The dance on the green, and crowning of Rosina as the "Queen of May." The last interview between the lover and his betrothed. Preparations for departure. Arrival of the coach. The farewell. The father's blessing. . . .

ACT II

The intelligence office. Rosina in search of employment. The design of Florence frustrated by the interference of Bartley. Rosina escapes from the snare. A view of Faneuil Hall and the adjacent buildings. Mendon's first encounter with Rosina in the city. False representations. Misplaced confidence of Rosina. The Restaurant. Another snare — Rosina in the house of Alice Warren. Ballad, Rosina, "Home, sweet Home." Alice a confederate of Mendon's. The unwilling consent. The ball and the fatal promise. . . .

ACT III

The father in search of his lost child. Jethro communicates intelligence of the

mother's death. The resolve. Local scene, Court-street. ''We won't go home till morning.'' The once happy Rosina a supplicant for charity. The fruits of error. Interview between the stranger lad and the father. The father's curse. Wharf. The robbery. Mendon a thief. Arrest and escape. Sal Pentland's house. Mendon seeks refuge from the officers. Encounter of the father and seducer. Death of Rosina and the father's terrible revenge.

The play opens with the inhabitants of the village assembled on the green in front of the Meadows' cottage, celebrating spring in song and dance:

> In merry, merry May, all nature is gay,
> In merry, merry May, all nature is gay;
> Cold winter is driven, is driven to his lair,
> Cold winter is driven, is driven to his lair.
> The goat and the wether browse together on the heather,
> And the trees, and the trees don their liveries rare;
> The goat and the wether browse together on the heather,
> And the trees, and the trees don their liveries rare.
> (*End of verse all dance.*)
>
> In peace and content, so bounteously sent,
> In peace and content, so bounteously sent;
> Shall lighten every toil, every toil each day,
> Shall lighten every toil, every toil each day.
> And when the shades of evening draw the curtains of heaven,
> On the green, on the green, we will dance blithe and gay;
> And when the shades of evening draw the curtains of heaven,
> On the green, on the green, we will dance blithe and gay.

Into this Eden comes Harry Mendon, the worldly stranger from Boston, who comments:

> Here is a village apparently enjoying its primitive simplicity; but, I fear that the frequent and easy communication with the city by the railroad's iron arm may even now have tinctured it with its vices.

He meets the kindly Meadows, his wife, and beautiful daughter Rosina, and is invited to share their "frugal fare."

> MENDON. O, sir! no city noble, sheltered in his proud mansion, ever feasted so joyously as I do now! Yours is the bread of industry sweetened with content, made doubly so by youth, beauty and innocence—nature's heaven-born handmaids!

OLD MEADOWS. The gentleman pleases to flatter you, Rose, as well as us, wife. Ah! it almost makes the tears come into my old eyes, when I think the dear girl leaves us to-day!

MENDON. Leaves you, for what?

OLD MEADOWS. Why, sir, she goes to Boston, to seek what the girls call her fortune. Pray Heaven it may be a good one!

MENDON. Does she go there for the first time?

OLD MEADOWS. Ay, she was cradled here in the woods! She has spent her childhood here, and has grown up a girl of seventeen, without being from the sight of this humble cottage. . . .

MENDON. So young and innocent a girl will find many snares and temptations in the city. I fear her course is over a wild and tumultuous sea, full of rocks and quicksands.

OLD MEADOWS. But while virtue and modesty are her guides, she has nothing to fear from dangers such as those. She has learned both from the great book of Nature, written by the hand of God!

MENDON. His hand is indeed here, and every leaf and blossom invites us to his love. God made the country; man made the town. There vice is clothed in the temptations that misguided our first parents, and brought sin and death into the world. Heaven forfend that so fair a blossom as Rosina Meadows should be untimely nipped!

OLD MEADOWS. Amen to that! I love my daughter,—words cannot express how much I love her; but I would rather see her a corse at my feet, and follow her to the cold grave, the headstone marking where sleeps the child of virtue, than harm should befall her!

George Milton, the local farmer's son, is betrothed to Rosina, and bids her farewell, but warns:

MILTON. I do not doubt you, Rosina; but I know the temptations that beset a young female's path in a great city! O, beware the garb of friendship! Villainy often lurks unseen—thousands pollute the air with their pestilential breath—they mount the flowery path where innocence presides, and even the domestic fireside is not safe from its evil eyes! You will ever, dear Rosa, bear in mind the advice I gave you last night! O, remember, dearest, there is a heart which will be true to you wherever you may go! Heaven preserve you from all harm!

ROSINA. I have engraved it on my heart with the pen of affection! Nay, I can remember the very words;—and I remember that, I am going to a gay and thoughtless city. Temptations will be thrown in my way—vice is there to deceive the young and innocent! The libertine is there—he pollutes the air with his pestilential breath, and, like the deadly upas [a poisonous influence], destroys all who come within its deadly circle! His presence darkens every avenue, and even the domestic fireside is not safe from his evil eyes! Be assured, dear George, I shall remember your counsel!

During her first week in the city, Rosina seeks work at the employment agency and escapes being sent to a brothel only by the intervention of a stranger. Then she meets again Harry Mendon who offers help, and marriage.

MENDON. I have been long acquainted with your father, Miss Rosina, and would be proud to render a service to his daughter. Permit me to interest myself for you. You would prefer some light work; a milliner's employment might suit your views. Rosina, do not think me rude—the time, the place is unseasonable for such a question, but forgive me—my heart will admit of no longer delay—are your affections engaged?

ROSINA. Sir, I fear you mock me, when the wealthy and beloved son of the Mendons declares his love for Rosina Meadows, an humble farmer's daughter! (*Turns from him.*)

MENDON. Do not turn from me, Rosina, but cheer me with those beauteous eyes, if words refuse to reply.

ROSINA. I have been taught to look with distrust upon every one—even upon you!

MENDON. Miss Meadows, you judge too harshly; there are those in this city to whom innocence and beauty such as thine are incentives to wicked and unholy thoughts. I look with shame and pity upon the thousands who sacrifice all the purest feelings of nature upon the altar of sensuality; far be it from me to indulge for one moment in such base motives. Your parents, before I left them, requested me to keep a watchful eye upon you, and I will fulfil the trust. I feel the prize I love never can be mine, and I will henceforth devote my energies to the advancement of your welfare. Let not your fears refuse me so trifling a boon as the favor of walking by your side. Could you read my heart, you would be assured that I am governed by the purest motives in tendering my, perhaps, unwelcome assistance!

ROSINA. I believe you, Mr. Mendon, and will rely on you.

MENDON. You may, Rosina; let me have your confidence, and you will attain all you desire. (*Aside.*) And so shall I.

In the following months, Rosina is led to believe that George Milton no longer loves her, and is deceived by Harry's smooth talk and betrayed by a fake marriage ceremony. Meanwhile, Rosina's father and George Milton travel to Boston to search for her, and learn that she has been deceived and then abandoned.

OLD MEADOWS. 'T is true, all true—every word of it—I feel it here. O, my child, why could you not see the snare that was weaving around you? Why did you not hear the loud laugh of the libertine as he exulted over his anticipated conquests? She was then the child of innocence. She dwelt around the paradise, created by her own holy thoughts, and saw not the serpent that lay beneath her feet!

MILTON. I hear the villain that has caused all this desolation has fallen from his

high estate, and ranks among villains, gamblers, and other notorious characters that prowl about the city.

OLD MEADOWS. A terrible retribution upon the seducer of my child! O thou, who knowest all things; who saw the villain smile when dark, unholy thoughts were rife within his heart; who heard that solemn vow of marriage; O, place me face to face with the despoiler; let me meet his eye, and if my gaze does not strike death to his coward heart, then shall my hands tear from him the guilty life who lives on sufferance now!

Rosina has no means of support, and in desperation, disguises herself and seeks out Harry Mendon in his drinking den.

MENDON. For Heaven's sake, what do you want with me, woman! (*Draws aside her veil.*) Great God! is it you, Rosina, out so late at night, and in such a dress; what can you be in search of? Can this be Rosina whom I once loved so dearly?

ROSINA. Base man! that holy feeling never entered your heart! Look upon me—do you know me? 'T is true, I wear not now upon my cheek the ruddy glow of innocence—the pure air of my native village has not fanned my cheek for many a day. The dishonored blandishments of a false heart have driven me from the roof of virtue to the house of vice!

MENDON. I have not driven you there! What are your misfortunes to me? I know naught of them!

ROSINA. Ay, but you will—you will! The recording angel has it there! there in his eternal book! 'T is recorded with a diamond pen. He who stood before the altar, with the habiliments of the man of God, falsely pronounced us man and wife before Heaven's great tribunal! And he who sits in majesty upon the high throne of Heaven will give the sentence of the convicted destroyer of honor!

MENDON. Hush! Speak lower, Rosina, or they will hear you! I would not have my friends there think that the wretched object before me was the once—There, don't speak—I know all; but what want you of me?

ROSINA. Want! (*Kneels.*) Yes, I'm crushed and cannot sink any lower! I want money—I am famishing, houseless, and friendless—give me money! Shall I pray for you or fear you that a father's curse would cling to the prayer on its passage to the judgment-seat, or that a dead mother standing before the eternal throne will plead against the supplication?

MENDON. You are disgraced now; you are not what you once were; but why do you not leave me? I will give you anything, so you leave me. Do not notice me in the streets, or let me hear your voice. I will give you money, anything—here, take this, young woman, and see you use it properly!

STANLEY. Holloa, Harry! you are getting liberal, to waste a five-dollar-bill on a girl that walks the streets!

MENDON. This is a poor beggar, and has told me a piteous story of her wants!

ROSINA. O, may Heaven forgive you!

MENDON. Amen! but go—there's a good girl!

ROSINA. I will, and seek my father! The darkness of the night shall not prevent me. Heaven, thou art the last to deceive the wanderer—thou wilt guide my steps!

Still disguised, Rosina finds her father and listens in shame to his tale.

OLD MEADOWS. My daughter went there full of bright hopes; the rosy hue of health was on her cheek, and innocence in her dark eye; she promised to bring back both to her parents; we waited a long while, but she came not; and, at last, we heard—

ROSINA. I cannot support it. You had a daughter there?

OLD MEADOWS. Did you know her, sir?

ROSINA. Too well! Alas! too well!

OLD MEADOWS. If you thus feel for her, what must be the feelings of her poor heart-broken father! What are your sorrows compared to mine? Poverty I could have borne. With her I could buffet every stream of adversity which Providence might have cast upon me, and smile and feel happy amidst every calamity! O, God! what are all earthly woes, compared to the feelings of a disgraced, broken-hearted and doting father?

ROSINA. She lives, and may yet be saved!

OLD MEADOWS. Ay, she lives, but she has lost that which alone makes life valuable to woman—her honor! You may show me the casket, but the jewel is lost forever!

ROSINA. Is there no hope?

OLD MEADOWS. Ask the mariner who stands upon the wreck of his own proud vessel, as it breaks piece by piece beneath the angry billows, and while the thunders roll, and the lightnings flash, and display the death which awaits him, ask him to hope!

ROSINA. And may she not return to her home, and, falling on her knees as I do now, look up to you with clasped hands and contrite heart, and implore, in the face of God, your forgiveness?

OLD MEADOWS. Yes, let her come, if she can, and see this bleeding heart; let her look upon these bitter, scalding tears—this hollow cheek and death-struck form; let her look upon these white hairs, disgraced by her—the never-sleeping agony that rends this mind with its fearful delirium! Let her come and see the work she has wrought, and hear the curse, the terrible curse of a heart-broken father!

(ROSINA *throws off disguise and closely clings to* MEADOWS *as he goes up centre.*)

ROSINA. Father, in Heaven's name, do not curse me!—do not! I am your—O, God!—your child ! I am your once-beloved child!—your Rosina! Heaven look down, and have mercy on me!

(*Tableau.* ROSINA *falls at the feet of her father. Scene closes them in.*)

Harry Mendon gambles away his fortune, and is caught by city watchmen while attempting to rob one of the dockyard offices. Rosina hears of Harry's capture and rushes in.

ROSINA. Behold, Harry Mendon, this is thy work!

(ROSINA *falls,* R.C.)

OLD MEADOWS. (*Outside.*) Ah, that voice! that name! Where is he?

(*Rushes on with* GEORGE MILTON *through door in C.* GEORGE *goes to* ROSINA, *kneels and raises her head.* ROSINA *recognizes him.*)

OLD MEADOWS. Heaven, thou hast heard my prayer! Villain! thy race of wickedness is run! Thy time is come!—seducer! murderer of my child! look upon her father! Sweet, crushed flower, I forgive you! Bless you! bless you! . . .

ROSINA. (*On R.*.) Then, I die happy!

(*Dies in the arms of* GEORGE MILTON.)

OLD MEADOWS. (C.) She's gone. Now, villain, prepare!—the fiat hath gone forth which said blood for blood!

MENDON. (L.C.) Officers, protect me from this madman!

OLD MEADOWS. Mad! 'T is false! I am not mad; for I look on a scene like this, and the tears course each other down my cheeks, and my heart will break with grief! Come, you are waited for! Why should you remain, while she is bounding towards the skies?

MENDON. Stand off, maniac!

OLD MEADOWS. No, my wife, my child, are torn from me—I have no one to clasp—you shall supply their places! Come, kneel with me at the altar of my child's lost honor! How?—will you not mind ?—Nay, then—

(*The officers, &c., have their backs to the audience, and do not observe the movement of* MEADOWS.)

MENDON. Mercy!

OLD MEADOWS. Thou didst have no mercy, and canst expect none! Nay, do not shriek—she cannot hear thee—her spirit is even now hovering over thee, impatient to denounce thee at the judgment-seat! 'T is time for the sacrifice! (*Seizes him.*) Villain! Seducer!—Murderer! Die! Die!

(*Music. He strangles him. The watchmen and citizens rush forward to rescue* MENDON *from the grasp of* MEADOWS—*as they take him from* MEADOWS, MENDON *falls dead. The watchmen stand at the side of* MEADOWS, *in C., who stands with one hand pointing to heaven, the other to* ROSINA, *on R.C.*).

TABLEAU.

Curtain falls to slow music.

Charles Farrar Browne, best known as Artemus Ward, was one of the most popular humorists on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1860s. His comic lectures and brief sketches burlesqued popular culture, including the melodrama.

Artemus Ward, "A Romance.—Only a Mechanic," in *Artemus Ward; His Travels* (New York: Carleton, 1865), 65–66.

In a sumptously furnished parlor in Fifth Avenue, New York, sat a proud and haughty belle. Her name was Isabel Sawtelle. Her father was a millionaire, and his ships, richly laden, ploughed many a sea.

By the side of Isabel Sawtelle sat a young man with a clear, beautiful eye, and a massive brow.

"I must go," he said, "the foreman will wonder at my absence."

"The *foreman*?" asked Isabel in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, the foreman of the shop where I work."

"Foreman—shop—*work*! What! do *you* work?"

"Aye, Miss Sawtelle! I am a cooper!" and his eyes flashed with honest pride.

"What's that?" she asked; "it is something about barrels, isn't it!"

"It is!" he said, with a flashing nostril. "And hogsheads."

"Then go!" she said, in a tone of disdain—go *away*!"

"Ha!" he cried, "you spurn me, then, because I am a mechanic. Well, be it so! though the time has come, Isabel Sawtelle," he added, and nothing could *exceed* his looks at this moment—

"when you will bitterly remember the cooper you now so cruelly cast off! *Farewell*!"

Years rolled on. Isabel Sawtelle married a miserable aristocrat, who recently died of delirium tremens. Her father failed, and is now a raving maniac, and wants to bite little children. All her brothers (except one) were sent to the penitentiary for burglary, and her mother peddles clams that are stolen for her by little George, her only son that has his freedom. Isabel's sister Bianca rides an immoral spotted horse in the circus, *her* husband having long since been hanged for murdering his own uncle on his mother's side. Thus we see that it is always best to marry a mechanic.

Classic Melodrama's Audiences

During a fortnight in Boston in 1850, Nathaniel Hawthorne went to William Pelby's National Theatre on the evening of May 7. The National, situated in the working-class North End, offered the same kind of dramatic spectacles and melodrama as New York's Bowery theaters. As usual, Hawthorne made a detailed pen-portrait in his notebook.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks*, ed. Claude M. Simpson [*The Cente-*



Matthew Brady's daguerreotype of the early 1850s depicted the celebrated actress Charlotte Cushman as Meg Merrilies in *Guy Mannering* and illustrated her intensely melodramatic style. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

nary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, vol. 8] (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), 501–4.

I went, last night, to the National Theatre to see a pantomime; it was Jack the Giant Killer, and somewhat heavy and tedious. The audience was more noteworthy than the play. The theatre itself is for the middling and lower classes; and I had not

taken my seat in the most aristocratic part of the house; so that I found myself surrounded chiefly by young sailors, Hanover-street shopmen, mechanics, and other people of that kidney. It is wonderful the difference that exists in the personal aspect and dress, and no less in the manners, of the people in this quarter of the city, compared with others. One would think that Oak Hall should give a common garb and air to the great mass of the Boston population; but it seems not to be so; and perhaps what is most singular is, that the natural make of the men has a conformity and suitableness to their dress. Glazed caps and Palo Alto hats were much worn. It is a pity that this picturesque and comparatively graceful hat should not have been generally adopted, instead of falling to the exclusive use of a rowdy class.

In the next box to me were two young women, with an infant of perhaps three or four months old (if so much) but to which of them appertaining, I could not at first discover. One was a large, plump girl, with a heavy face, a snub nose, coarse looking, but good-natured, and with no traits of evil; save, indeed, that she had on the vilest gown—of dirty white cotton, so pervadingly dingy that it was white no longer, as it seemed to me—the sleeves short, and ragged at the borders—and an old faded shawl, which she took off on account of the heat—the shabbiest of dress, in a word, that I ever saw a woman wear. Yet she was plump, as aforesaid, and looked comfortable in body and mind. I imagine that she must have had a better dress at home, but had come to the theatre extemporaneously, and not going to the dress-circle, considered her ordinary gown good enough for the occasion. The other girl seemed as young, or younger than herself; she was small, with a particularly intelligent and pleasant face, not handsome, perhaps, but as good or better than if it were. It was mobile with whatever sentiment chanced to be in her mind; as quick and vivacious in its movements as I have ever seen; cheerful, too, and indicative of a sunny, though I should think it might be a hasty temper. She was dressed in a dark gown, (chintz, I suppose the women call it,) a good homely dress, proper enough for the fireside, but a strange one to appear at a theatre in. Both these girls seemed to enjoy themselves very much; the large and heavy one, in her own duller mode; the smaller manifesting her interest by gestures, pointing at the stage, and so vivid a talk of countenance that I could sympathize as well as if she had spoken. She was not a brunette; and this made her vivacity of expression all the more agreeable. Her companion, on the other hand, was so dark that I rather suspected her to have a tinge of African blood.

There were two men who seemed to have some connection with these girls; one was an elderly, gray-headed personage, well stricken in liquor, talking loudly and foolishly, but good-humouredly; the other a young man, sober, and doing his best to keep his elder friend quiet. The girls seemed to give themselves no uneasiness about the matter. Both these men wore Palo Alto hats. I could not make out whether either of the men were the father of the child, or what was the nature of the union among them; though I was inclined to set it down as a family-party.

As the play went on, the house became crowded, and oppressively warm; and the poor little baby grew dark red, or purple almost, with the uncomfortable heat in its

small body. It must have been accustomed to discomfort, and have concluded it to be the condition of mortal life; else it never would have remained so quiet. . . . Perhaps it had been quieted with a sleeping potion. The two young women were not negligent of it, but passed it to-and-fro between them, each willingly putting herself to inconvenience for the sake of tending it. But I really feared it might die in some kind of fit; so hot was the theatre; so purple with heat, yet so strangely quiet, was the child. I was glad to hear it cry, at last; but it did not cry with any great rage and vigor, as it should, but in a stupid kind of way. Hereupon, the smaller of the two girls, after a little efficacious dandling, at once settled the question of maternity, by uncovering her bosom, and presenting it to the child, with so little care of concealment that I saw, and anyone else might have seen, the whole breast, and the apex which the infant's little lips compressed. Yet there was nothing indecent in this; but a perfect naturalness. The child sucked a moment or two, and then became quiet, but still looked very purple. Children must be hard to kill, however injudicious the treatment. The two girls, and their cavaliers, remained till nearly the close of the play. I should like well to know who they are—of what condition in life—and whether reputable as members of the class to which they belong. My own judgement is, that they are so.

Throughout the evening, drunken young sailors kept stumbling into and out of the boxes, calling to one another from different parts of the house, shouting to the performers, and singing the burthens of songs. It was a scene of life in the rough.

Mortimer Q. Thomson ["Doesticks"] wrote humorous essays for publications like *The Spirit of the Times* in the 1850s. New to the big city, he delighted in city sights and scenes. He devoted one book to urban entertainments of all kinds—target-company excursions, Barnum's Museum, street sideshows, but especially the popular theater. Two debunking essays on the overwrought style of melodrama, another disparaging commentary on "colored theatricals" ["Shakspeare Darkeyized"] were paired with a scathing review of the newsboys' pulp drama at the Bowery Theatre.

Q. K. Philander Doesticks, P. B. [Mortimer Q. Thomson], *Doesticks: What He Thinks* (New York: Edward Livermore, 1855), 228–34.

I also desired to go over to the twenty-five cent side of the town, and behold the splendors of their dramatic world. Accordingly, I've been to the Bowery Theatre—the realm of orange-peel and peanuts—the legitimate home of the unadulterated, undiluted sanguinary drama—the school of juvenile Jack-Sheppardism, where adolescent "shoulder hitters" and politicians in future take their first lessons in rowdyism.

Where the seeds of evil are often first planted in the rough bosom of the uncared-for boy, and, developed by the atmosphere of this moral hot-house, soon blossom into crime.

Where, by perverted dramatic skill, wickedness is clothed in the robes of romance and pseudo-heroism so enticingly as to captivate the young imagination, and many a

mis-taught youth goes hence into the world with the firm belief that to rival Dick Turpin or Sixteen-String Jack is the climax of earthly honor.

A place where they announce a grand ''benefit'' five nights in the week, for the purpose of cutting off the free-list, on which occasions the performance lasts till the afternoon of the next day.

Where the newsboys congregate to see the play, and stimulate, with their discriminating plaudits, the ''star'' of the evening.

For this is the spawning-ground of theatrical luminaries unheard-of in other spheres; men who having so far succeeded in extravagant buffoonery, or in that peculiar kind of serious playing which may be termed mad-dog tragedy, as to win the favor of this audience, forthwith claim celestial honors, and set up as ''stars.''

And a star benefit-night at this establishment is a treat; the beneficiary feasts the whole company after the performance, and they hurry up their work as fast as possible so as to begin their jollification at the nearest tavern; they have a preliminary good time behind the scenes with such viands and potables as admit of hurried consumption. . . .

But the Bowery audiences are, in their own fashion, critical, and will have everything, before the curtain, done to suit their taste.

An actor must do his utmost, and make things ring again; and wo be to him who dares, in a ferocious struggle, a bloody combat, or a violent death, to abate one single yell, to leave out one bitter curse, or omit the tithe of a customary contortion. He will surely rue his presumption, for many a combatant has been forced to renew an easily won broadsword combat, adding fiercer blows, and harder stamps—and many a performer who has died too comfortably, and too much at his ease to suit his exacting audience, has been obliged to do it all over again, with the addition of extra jerks, writhings, flounderings, and high-pressure spasms, until he has ''died the death'' set down for him.

An actress, to be popular at this theatre, must be willing to play any part, from Lady Macbeth to Betsey Baker—sing a song, dance a jig, swallow a sword, ride a bare-backed horse, fight with guns, lances, pistols, broadswords, and single-sticks—walk the tight-rope, balance a ladder on her nose, stand on her head and even throw a back-summerset. She must upon occasion play male parts, wear pantaloons, smoke cigars, swear, swagger, and drink raw-whiskey without making faces.

The refined taste which approbates these qualifications is also displayed in the selection of dramas suitable for their display. Shakspeare, as a general thing, is too slow. Richard III might be endured, if they would bring him a horse when he calls for it, and let him fight Richmond and his army singlehanded, and finally shoot himself with a revolver, rather than give up beat.

Macbeth could only expect an enthusiastic welcome, if all the characters were omitted but the three witches and the ghost of Banquo; but usually nothing but the most slaughterous tragedies and melo-dramas of the most mysterious and sanguinary stamp, give satisfaction.

A tragedy hero is a milk-sop, unless he rescues some forlorn maiden from an impregnable castle, carries her down a forty-foot ladder in his arms, holds her with one hand, while with the other he annihilates a score or so of pursuers, by picking up one by the heels, and with him knocking out the brains of all the rest, then springs upon his horse, leaps him over a precipice, rushes him up a mountain, and finally makes his escape with his prize amid a tempest of bullets, Congreve rockets, Greek fire and bombshells.

Thus it may be supposed that no ordinary materials will furnish stock for a successful Bowery play. Probabilities, or even improbable possibilities, are too tame. Even a single ghost to enter in a glare of blue light, with his throat cut, and a bloody dagger in his breast, and clanking a dragging-chain, would be too commonplace.

When the boys are in the chivalric vein, and disposed to relish a hero, to content them he must be able, in defence of distressed maidens, (the Bowery boys are ragged knights-errant in their way, and greatly compassionate forlorn damsels,) to circumvent and destroy a small-sized army, and eat the captain for luncheon.

If they are in a murderous mood, nothing less than a full-grown battle, with a big list of killed and wounded, will satisfy their thirst for blood; and if they fancy a touch of the ghastly, nothing will do but new-made graves, coffins, corpses, gibbering ghosts, and grinning skeletons.

I went by the old, damaged ''spout-shop'' the other day—saw a big bill for the evening, and stopped to read—magnificent entertainment—to commence with a five-act tragedy, in which the hero is pursued to the top of a high mountain, and after slaying multitudes of enemies, he is swallowed up by an earthquake, mountain and all, just in time to save his life.

Professor Somebody was to go from the floor to the ceiling on a tight rope, having an anvil tied to each foot, and a barrel of salt in his teeth—then the interesting and bloody drama, ''the Red Revenging Ruffian Robber, or Bold Blueblazo of the Bloody Bradawl''—after which, a solo on the violin, half a dozen comic songs, three fancy dances, and a recitation of the ''Sailor Boy's Dream,'' with a real hammock to ''spring from,'' three farces, and a comic opera—then Bullhead's Bugle Band would give a concert, assisted by the Ethiopian Minstrel Doves—then an amateur would dance the Shanghae Rigadoon on a barrel-head—after which Madame Jumpli Theo. Skratch would display her agility by leaping through a balloon over a pyramid, composed of a hose truck, two beer barrels, and a mountain of green fire.

Numberless other things were promised, in the shape of firemen's addresses, songs, legerdemain, acrobatic exercises, ventriloquism, &c., the whole to conclude with an original extravaganza, in which the whole company would appear.

The Ten-Twenty-Thirty Melodramas

The playwright Porter Emerson Browne's description of the "mellowdrammer" at a "humble abode of Thespis" was a mocking but affectionate portrait of the popular theater and its conventions.

Porter Emerson Browne, "The Mellowdrammer," *Everybody's Magazine* 21 (September 1909): 349, 354.

If you are at all familiar with the mellowdrammer as she is writ, you must know that the construction of one is a science as exact as is the making of a custard pie. They have rules for making them—just as they do for lobster à la Newburg, or deviled crabs, or stuffed tomatoes. It is a recipe that any one may obtain for the price of an admission ticket and a little observation.

Lest, however, you have not the money for the one nor the time for the other, I am glad herewith to give the recipe; and if you have the needed ingredients, I am sure that you'll have no difficulty in making as good a mellowdrammer as was ever cooked up by the best chefs in the business.

Here you are:

Take one good and beautiful heroine (peroxide, if possible), one poor but honest hero, one villain the size of an egg, a comedian (Irish, Dutch, Chinese or Rube), a soubrette with dropstitch stockings and a voice like a planing-mill, a villainess who has suspiciously buried three husbands, and half a dozen other assorted characters. Put the whole into a large stage and then beat the heroine for two hours. You may also beat the hero, as well, though care should be taken not to touch the villain and villainess. Sprinkle in the other characters from time to time. Season with large lumps of pathos, great gobs of heart interest, and cupfuls of unstrained humor. Flavor to taste with railroad trains, saw-mills, runaway horses, automobiles, steam-rollers, earthquakes, cyclones, forest fires, wild steers, and volcanoes.

When almost done, take out the hero and heroine and knead them carefully together. Throw the villain and villainess under the sink. You should be very careful to call the hero Harold Wintergreen, Reginald Worthington, or some such simple name. The villain should always wear riding breeches and papier maché puttees in the first act, a misfit business suit with high-water pants in the second, and a hired dress suit in the third and fourth. He should be called Sir Marmaduke Mungummery or Archibald Mainwaring or some similar name. You can always procure good names from Ouida or Laura Jean Libbey or any other old, established dealer.

Don't be afraid of seasoning too highly, nor of cooking too fiercely. You can't do it. . . .

Throughout the whole, harrowing story of the trials and tribulations of Lizzie, the Beautiful Saleslady, the audience swings from one emotion to another with all the easy facility with which monkeys in a cage gyrate from trapeze to trapeze. In the pathetic parts (or rather the bathetic parts), they shed salt tears into saturated handkerchiefs with the arrant prodigality of those obsessed by personal suffering—that is, the female element does; and the male element tries not to, and looks foolish. The laugh taps are turned on just as easily; and every time the hero and the heroine save each other's lives, the girl next to you almost swallows her gum, while the eyes of the man at your other side snap brightly and his hands clench.

The audience from gallery to orchestra joins in hungrily hissing the villain; they adore the leading man with devout eyes and long-drawn sighs; they love and pity the heroine and excoriate their hearts in tempestuous sympathy for her hard lot. And I, for one, think it is a mighty good thing that they don't see her after the performance eating fifteen cents' worth of chop-suey and rice, complaining the while because she gets only half salary in Holy Week and explaining how, if it weren't for managerial ''fatheadedness,'' she'd be ''headin' her own comp'ny on Broadway and givin' some o' them favored ham actorines a run for their money.'' It's just as well, too, that they don't see the leading man and the villain hobnobbing together over a glass of beer and making a free lunch counter look like a locust-ridden wheat-field in a dry season, as they tell each other what good actors they are and lie about their salaries.

In the vernacular, the melodramatic audience is a ''warm'' house to play to—it ''eats'' a ''show.''

And why not? It's real to them; as real as is life itself—and sometimes even more real than life itself. True, the audience has no taste, no discrimination, no sense of the ridiculous to obscure or destroy appreciation. It cannot tell pathos from bathos, and to it the exaggerated, affected acting and mannerisms and enunciation of the players; the dull, tawdry absurdity of the scenery; the glaring inconsistencies in both production and text; the utter lack of logic; the hopeless impossibility of situation, convey only the impression of actual things that actually exist, of events actually happening before its very eyes. Melodramatic audiences are the children of the theatre—the Peter Pans of stageland.

After our operas; after our skilfully woven, consistently created, glitteringly dialogued plays; after our gorgeous spectacular and musical productions; after our wonderfully written, wonderfully staged, wonderfully played pieces of all descriptions, we can loll back critically in our chairs, and cast amused and tolerant eyes upon these children of the theatre. But away down in our hearts, don't we, now, honestly wish that we could get out of a dramatic offering one thousandth part of the amusement and excitement and entertainment that these do. Don't we envy them, just a little, that infinite capacity for enjoyment that is theirs? I do.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Owen Davis was the most successful playwright in melodrama, and, at his peak, wrote one play a month, which he also directed. Davis's *Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model* (1906) ran for five seasons on the Lower East Side. Each of the four acts had a moment of high tension when the villain threatened the life of the department-store heroine: she was pushed under a descending escalator, thrown off the Brooklyn Bridge, tied to the tracks of the elevated railroad, threatened by early-morning intrusion into her bedroom. "I have never taken my characters from real life," Davis explained. He preferred larger-than-life protagonists and based his plots on "a little more highly colored" events that spiced everyday reality and were reported in the press. When he decided to seek critical

recognition in the legitimate theater, he explained the formula for success in the less demanding popular circuit.

Owen Davis, "Why I Quit Writing Melodrama," *American Magazine* 128 (September 1914): 29–30.

The plays that we produced were written largely by rule. In fact the actual writing of one of these sensational melodramas I had reduced to a formula, about as follows:

TITLE (at least fifty per cent of success)

PLOT: Brief story of the play.

CAST: *Leading Man*, very (even painfully) virtuous.

Leading Woman, in love with him.

Comedy Man, always faithful friend of Hero.

Soubrette, very worthy person (poor but honest) and always in love with *Comedian*.

Heavy Man, a villain, not for any special reason, but, like "Topsy," "born bad."

Heavy Woman,—here I had a wider choice, his lady, being allowed to fasten her affections upon either *Hero* or *Villain* (sometimes both) but never happily.

Father (or *Mother*), to provide sentiment.

Fill in as desired with character parts.

ACT I—Start the trouble.

ACT II—Here things look bad. The lady having left home, is quite at the mercy of *Villain.*

ACT III—The lady is saved by the help of the Stage Carpenter. (The big scenic and Mechanical effects were always in Act III.)

ACT IV—The lovers are united and the villains are punished.

I suppose that I have been responsible for as many executions as the Queen in "Alice in Wonderland." I am honest enough to admit my cold-blooded attitude; but apply this chart to many plays of authors who consider their work inspired, and see if it fits.

These plays depended very greatly upon scenic effect, sensational dramatic title, and enormously melodramatic pictorial display on the bill boards. I think we touched upon every theme known to man, and every location. We limited ourselves, however, to American subjects. We always had a clear and dominant love interest, which we crossed with an element of danger, usually furnished by a rather impossible villain or adventuress. The themes of some of these plays were absolutely legitimate and the stories in many cases, with different dressing, would have done for a Broadway theater of the present day. But we had to, or fancied we had to, have such an over-abundance of climactic material that our plays resulted in an undigested mass of unprepared situations. Where one carefully prepared and well-developed episode would really have been of far greater dramatic value, we made a rule of dividing our plays into no less than fifteen scenes, the end of each being a moment of perilous

suspense or terrifying danger. This gave the playwright rather less than seven minutes to instruct his audience, to prepare his climaxes, to plant the seed for the next scene, and to *reach* his climaxes, which of course was absurdly impossible and resulted, I feel sure, in a form of entertainment which was only too ready to yield to the encroachment of the cheap vaudeville and moving pictures.

At the turn of the century, the journalist Rollin Lynde Hartt visited a cheap, inner-city, melodrama theater, probably the most famous, the Grand Opera House on New York's Bowery. His interest was primarily in the reaction of the lower-class audience, whom he labeled "Neolithic," to the staple blood-and-thunder fare of "Ten Commandments in red fire." He characterized the melodrama by citing the jingle of the lyricist Nathaniel P. Adams:

Rollin Lynde Hartt, *The People At Play* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1909), 158, 160, 161–67, 174–75, 182–83, 185–86, 188–90.

If you want a receipt for a melodramatical,
Thrillingly thundery popular show,
Take an old father, unyielding, emphatical,
Driving his daughter out into the snow;
The love of a hero, courageous and Hacketty,
Hate of a villain in evening clothes;
Comic relief that is Irish and racketty;
Schemes of a villainess muttering oaths;
The bank and the safe and the will and the forgery—
All of them built on traditional norms—
Villainess dark and Lucrezia Borgery
Helping the villain until she reforms;
The old mill at midnight, a rapid delivery;
Violin music, all scary and shivery;
Plot that is devilish, awful, nefarious;
Heroine frightened, her plight is precarious;
Bingo!—the rescue!—the movement goes snappily—
Exit the villain and all endeth happily!
Take of these elements any you care about,
Put 'em in Texas, the Bowery, or thereabout;
Put in the powder and leave out the grammar,
And the certain result is a swell melodrammer. . . .

Reduce the conventional theatre to a state of dog-eared shabbiness; write commercial advertisements on the curtain; borrow a whiff or so of the Dime Museum's aroma, and fill the house with office-boys, bell-boys, messengers, common laborers, factory-girls, shop-girls, waitresses, and ''generals.'' There you have the Grand, want-

ing only the music, in which the drum predominates. To you, its incessant throbbing becomes oppressive. Not to those about you, though. One and all, they would endorse the sentiment if you quoted:—

> Bang-whang-whang! goes the drum. Tootle-te-tootle, the fife!
> No keeping one's haunches still; it's the greatest pleasure in life!

And now the curtain goes up. It little matters what scene it discloses. Be it Chinatown or the Riverside Drive, New Orleans or the Bad Lands, the same thrilling deeds of derring-do will be enacted by the same conventional machine-made characters as in the famous ''Boulevard du Crime'' two hundred years ago. Milieu may vary, types never.

Consider those types, those presumably immortal types, so dear to the popular heart. First the heroine:—She is ''in-no-cent.'' With ''quivering lips and moistened eye, her hands clasped meekly across her breast as though life was too heavy to bear,'' she tremulously reiterates the fact. Yet upon her, despite that aureole of angelic hair, those eyes so virtuously limpid, that rounded, maidenly figure, and the madonna-like sweetness of her ways, they have fastened accusations of arson, safe-cracking, forgery, and the murder of her husband. She is driven from home and kin. She is hounded by detectives. As the plot thickens, she grows eloquent. ''Oh misery, misery!'' she sobs. ''I am alone forever! The thought will drive me frantic! I am wretched, mad! What is left to me now but the deepest, darkest despair? Oh, I cannot bear it! My heart will break! Why do I not die?—why do I not die?'' She has life in her, though; lots of it. Wait till the villain sets about feeding her baby to the stone-crusher. It is with no little vigor, then, that she shrieks, ''Me child! Me chi-i-i-ild!!!''

Or wait till he makes love to her. Zounds, what a counterblast! ''Thou cur!'' she snaps. ''Unhand me, coward! The devilish cunning of your nature makes me shudder!'' In moments like these she towers up in a physical grandeur well suiting her moral sublimity. And she needs a quite marvelous vitality, you discover, to go through the harrowing and terrific adventures this villain prepares her. He loves her furiously and it would be gentler if he understood. But villainy is not to be ranked among the learned professions. It is singularly without intellect. In ''Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak-Model,'' the villain begins by causing the heroine to fall from the Brooklyn Bridge. Next, he pitches her overboard in mid-Atlantic. After that, he throws her under a freight elevator. Ultimately he says to her, ''Why do you fear me, Nellie?''

What made him a villain, ''no fellow can find out.'' He is a villain out of a clear sky, without motive or provocation, a ''bold bad man'' by nature, who has done all in his power to cultivate the gift. Hence a huge and horrid unpopularity, which he persistently augments till even the tiniest, tenderest gallery-god thirsts for his gore. The audience becomes so enraged that it hisses every time he comes on. Some cherish an abiding hatred; meeting him on the street next day, they openly insult him. In Texas,

villains have been shot at. And as a final proof of villainy, the fiend glories in his shame, taking obloquy as a sort of laurel-crown, a tribute to his art.

Art it is, gadzooks! To be called ''liar,'' ''scoundrel,'' ''puppy,'' ''toad,'' yet never reply in more ferocious terms than ''A time—will—come! Ha! Ha!''—this, methinks, argues that self-command which is the soul of virtuosity. Splendid, too, is the villain's talent for dropping flat when only half poked at by the hero; for never recognizing a detective disguised in a Piccadilly collar; for falling back foiled, although armed to the teeth, when the ''comic relief'' comes at him with bare knuckles, and for purloining wills and looting safes only at moments when witnesses swarm at his elbow. Moreover, if ''genius is patience,'' this demon possesses a really dazzling brand of genius. ''Foiled again''—and again and again—he pursues the evil tenor of his way.

And now the hero. Whereas the villain is completely and exhaustively villainous, the hero is completely and exhaustively heroic. You know it by his grand-opera stride, his righteously erect carriage, and the ring in his voice. Also by the creditable sentiments he exclaims while posing like any Olympian. ''What! tell a falsehood? Let me die first! Fear a treacherous foe? Never, while a brave heart beats within me bosom!'' ''I swear that with the last drop of me blood I will defend yonder hunted but innocent girl!'' To live up to this last proclamation requires a certain acrobatic nimbleness and a downright marvelous clairvoyance. Just when the heroine is about to be disintegrated by the sausage-machine, or reduced to longitudinal sections by the buzz-saw, or run over by the express-train as she lies bound across the rails, or blown to bits by the powder-barrel as the fuse sputters nearer and nearer, then—whoop-la!—in jumps the hero, who has foreseen all and turned up not a second too late. Down chimneys he comes, up woodchuck-holes, over yawning chasms, across tottering bridges, and along the ridgepoles of flaming buildings, to thwart the villain and succor beauty in distress. A demigod, that hero! . . .

And melodrama itself,—I find it perfect. Consider its problem. Wanted: By an incredibly dull audience, ten thousand thrills. To deliver those thrills takes something stronger, quicker, and simpler than the conventional play. Something stronger because the very dull require powerful stimulants to stave off torpor. These are they who love Salvationist rantings and whoopings, the yellow journal's tom-tom, and the dime novel's inspired hydrophobia; mild appeals leave them listless. Hence the merits of melodrama's wild and outrageous fury. . . .

Meanwhile, in the nine-and-twenty hair's-breadth-escape scenes of a melodrama, rapidity is everything. For three reasons. First, the audience knows what's coming; familiarity with ''hurrah stuff'' enables it to keep at least a minute ahead of the action. In the next place, it absolutely forgets itself. ''Save her!'' it shrieks. ''Save her!'' Or even, ''Look out, Bill, he's under the sofa!'' They tell how Salvini once choked his Desdemona in good faith; here it is the audience that is run away with by the convincing potency of art. And that mood won't last; one must strike while the iron is hot. Finally, melodrama is not got up for psychologists. Its devotees care nothing for the

portrayal of the inner life, save in its crudest, most ferocious manifestations; a few wild cries suffice. They want ''sump'n doin'.'' Strip the action, therefore, of all those interpretative, significant, philosophic touches that make it human. Give it go. Give it noise and bluster as it goes. Let it career madly, in a cloud of dust and with sparks flying.

And make it simple. The reason, really, why blood-and-thunder has for two centuries adhered to the rules set by the French *mélodrames*, is that their simplicity was absolute and final. They reduced character, incident, structure, and ideas to their lowest terms, enabling the Neolithic mind (and such is the Grand's) to comprehend. . . .

In the Grand's audience, pray notice, there are many who have had first-hand—or at least second-hand—acquaintance with the melodramatic. From among the Neolithic come firemen, policemen, seamen, and those who gain their bread in trades replete with danger and daring. Meanwhile the tenement street has its daily melodramas, such as these are,—melodramas of crime, drunkenness, and frightful vice, though generally lacking the completeness that would fit them for the stage. You know what happens when philanthropists transplant a family from the slum to the village. The family returns. It returns because its removal has involved an exchange of melodrama for ''the legitimate.'' . . .

While the life of the people gives a tremendous reality to the melodramatic, their reading super-emphasizes that reality. In your evening newspaper, somewhere among the items under inconspicuous headlines, you are told that when Mrs. Ahearn, who dwells in a certain remote city, stood shrieking at the window of a blazing tenement, it was her own son, Terence (of Hook-and-Ladder Three), who carried her fainting to the ground. In the Neolithic newspaper, on the other hand, the story fills half a page, with colossal headlines and thrilling illustrations. A dozen despatches of international importance are ''killed'' to make room for it. So you need hardly marvel that, when the Grand presents incidents familiar through experience and reading, the people accept them. They are plausible, stirring, and readily comprehended. . . .

However wild and unrepresentative the incident, and however crude (even to grotesquerie) the depiction of character, the underlying notions must consist solely of platitudes,—or, to put it more genially, of fundamental verities. Mr. [G. K.] Chesterton remarks with absolute justice, ''Melodrama is popular because it is profound truth; because it goes on repeating the things which humanity has found to be central facts. This endless repetition profoundly annoys the sensitive artist inside you and me. But it ought to profoundly please the realist. The melodrama is perpetually telling us that mothers are devoted to their children, because mothers are devoted to their children. Humanity may in time grow tired of hearing this truth; but humanity will never grow tired of fulfilling it. The melodramas say that men are chiefly sensitive upon honor and upon their personal claim to courage. Men are. It bores one to hear one's honor reiterated; but it would startle one to hear it denied. In so far as the melodrama is really bad, it is not bad because it expresses old ideas; it is bad because it so expresses them as to make them seem like dead ideas.''

Dead ideas? So they may seem to Mr. Chesterton while "hurrah stuff" rages before his eyes and chills-and-fever music rings in his ears. So they most emphatically do not seem to the Neolithic.

Corse Payton was often proclaimed "King of the Ten-Twenty-Thirty." As actor-manager, with Etta Reed, his wife and leading lady, he brought repertory theater to the small-town circuit of "opera houses" and "academies of music" in the Midwest in the 1890s. He applied much the same practices of "popular-priced" melodrama and weekly change of program—mixed motion pictures and short drama—at a permanent location, his Lee Avenue theater in Brooklyn, in 1901. Soon, he operated a circuit of four theaters in Greater New York, in association with his sister, Mary Gibbs Spooner. At his Friday matinee teas, where he served the pink lemonade favored by "candy butchers" at circuses and carnivals, Payton encouraged the audience to meet his stock company. Journalist Arthur Ruhl observed the clublike interaction at Payton's Union Square theater in 1911.

Arthur Ruhl, "Ten-Twenty-Thirty," *Outlook* 98 (August 1911): 890–91.

Letting people choose their own plays is one of the specialities of the ten-twenty-thirty houses. At the Academy of Music, where a stock company has been playing steadily since last August, they send out some eight thousand circulars a week, merely to give their patrons a general notion of next week's play. Often the audience chooses the plays to be put on, and the subscribers have the same seats for one evening a week throughout the winter.

Mr. Girard [the company's "heavy"] told how the audiences in Brooklyn said how-de-you to each other as they took their seats, and how you soon got to remember the faces out in front. And you couldn't fool the audience about the people on the stage. Send on one of their favorites in a pitch-dark scene as a detective or a burglar, and they'd recognize him, no matter what his disguise, and give him a hand. . . .

Mr. Corse Payton has done more than any one else, probably, to make the ten-twenty-thirty cent theater a family institution. He has been at it ten years now, and has four companies and something like a hundred players working for him. A Friday matinée . . . is a veritable orgy of this sort of thing that such an audience genuinely likes. A pink tea is one of Mr. Payton's great ideas. A big sign in the lobby announces it as the crowd comes in. Corse himself issues another invitation from the stage just before the last act, and as soon as the curtain falls the crowd pile up on the stage by way of the left-hand boxes—fat ladies in limp shirt-waists, pounding the scenery to see how real it is; giggling young girls, half-awed, half-contemptuous, in this behind-the-scenes world. . . .

Then there is a very good orchestra, and between the acts moving pictures, if you are at the Academy; if at the Grand Opera House, a versatile young man, who shifts scenery or something at other times, comes out in front of the curtain and sings an

illustrated song. There is a picture on the screen of a girl in a pink dress in a garden, and the athletic young tenor cries:

''Let's make love among the roses, dearie,
You and I,
Stealing little hugs, and tender kisses
On the sly.''

After the chorus has been sung once or twice the words themselves are flashed on the curtain. The vague hum that has followed the song comes out more confidently on the spearmint-scented air—there is a sort of pathos in the sibilant s's in the twilight—and the following the one man's voice are many feminine voices, a little off the key, perhaps, faltering, yet evidently in deadly earnest groping for the tune. . . .

[Corse Payton] suddenly shoots out in front of the curtain just before the last act, with a ''Hello, audience!'' and, swinging his arms, walks rapidly up and down the footlights, talking as he goes. Now and then he stops, whacks his head, or, elaborately twisting one hand round with the other, slaps his wrist, and continues his promenade.

''Next week we'll revive that grand old melodrama,'The Count of Monte Christo.' Splendid play—brings out the full strength of the company. After that, Mrs. Elinor Glyn's 'Three Weeks.' Beautiful scenic effects—good show—don't miss it. Prices same as usual—ten, twenty, and thirty cents. Dollar twenty a dozen. Ten cents admission—ten cents for 'Three Weeks.' Cheaper than room rent.'' The audience adore it. They wish he would go on forever. ''If there's anything you'd like, let us know. Lists of plays out in the lobby—a hundred of 'em. Pick out the one you like and tell us about it. That's what we're here for. Pretty soon we're going to put on a revival of the greatest melodrama ever written,'The Two Orphans.' Prices same as usual. Ten cents admission—five cents an orphan. (Slap). And if there's any thing you want, just vote for it. We'll play it. We play anything from 'Hamlet' to polo. Good-by, people''—and Corse goes slashing off, swinging his arms—''I'll come back.''

Anything from Hamlet to polo—with moving pictures and pink lemonades and the glad news from the curtain advertisements, that somebody's gum aids digestion and that your credit is good at Spink's. Of course, the *ingénue* is rather too giggly, and the juvenile in wiping out the lines of care doth his face so brilliantly incarnadine [color pink] that his eyes are but two black spots like the lumps of coal in a snow-man. The comic aunt overdoes her make-up by hanging a green parrot on the very rim of her bonnet, so that it flops up and down absurdly every time she moves her head.

There are all sorts of exaggerations, over-accents, a continuous scaling-down. You see the author's work through a glass darkly, perhaps. But you do see. For thirty cents (fifty in the evening) you see plays of established merit, while Broadway is paying two dollars to see plays tried out.

"LEG SHOW" BURLESQUE EXTRAVAGANZAS

"The Forty Flirts," or "40 la belle Parisiennes 40," were the highlight of the twice-daily "burlesque" show at the Folly, a low-comedy Brooklyn theater that Rollin Lynde Hartt attended at the turn of the century. For the price of twenty cents, in the company of men he described as a "herd" of petty criminals, he watched the dancers, billed as "a bevy of bouncing, bewitching, bewildering blondes" but sadly depleted in number and long past their prime, appear as soldiers, sailors, gondoliers, geishas, football players, college students, Moorish beauties. Ethnic comedy filled the gap between the frequent changes of costume. Fifty years before, Hartt noted, citing William Dean Howells as authority, burlesque had arrived from Europe as "a sensational and spectacular travesty upon legend and romance."[1] By contrast, this Folly show was a plotless, witless display of women's bodies, neither sensational nor spectacular, and if burlesque, had lost any hint of credible travesty. Most critics believed that the decline had been precipitated by the opening of *The Black Crook* in New York in September 1866. This musical extravanganza, part melodrama, part ballet, was, the delightedly shocked *Clipper* reported at the time, an "undress piece" that made women's "symmetrical legs and alabaster bosoms" a theatrical spectacle, and had influenced the rise of the "chorus girl" as a theatrical phenomenon.[2]

Never had there been such an expensive and lavish production as *The Black Crook*. A cast of several hundred appeared on stage, with three hundred costumes, two hundred stagehands attending, and the most brilliant effects yet seen. "The scenery is magnificent; the ballet is beautiful; the drama is—rubbish," William Winter of the *Tribune* concluded, after attending the opening night. The other critics agreed. "The text of the play is little else than stuffing to use up time while the great scenes are arranged," *Spirit of the Times* reported.[3] Charles M. Barras's plot was childishly simple—the English version some years later subtitled it *The Naughty Fairy*. How banal the saga of two lovers in a medieval castle, a dungeon, a cruel stepmother and a wicked count, a hunchbacked alchemist making a pact with the devil, demons and monsters as cheerleaders, a fairy queen in a grotto. It was the work of "gleaners," as the *Tribune* put it: a pastiche of Goethe's *Faust* and Weber's opera *Der*

Freischutz, and the chorus of water nymphs from *The Naiad Queen* of 1861. It was a burlesque in the sense that the comic episodes mocked operatic conventions. The main characters, Amina and Rodolfo (Rodolphe), were taken from Vincenzo Bellini's *La Sonnambula*, the most popular opera in America since its first staging in 1835.

However, the production most resembled the genre of song-and-dance melodramas which the French called the *féerie* and the English and Americans, the "Fairy Burlesque Spectacular Extravaganza." Supernatural elements —sprites clad in gold and silver, allegorical monsters, the struggle between angels and devils—were combined with the march of the Amazons. Visual splendor gave some coherence to fantasy and nonsense. The outstanding feature was the transformation scenes. Gradually one scene faded into another —even prolonged to fifteen minutes—with the aid of all that nineteenth-century lighting, chemical fire, stage machinery, painted sets, and grandiose props could muster. Such transformations were common in London or Paris theaters but had been attempted only rarely in America. *Bluebeard, or Female Curiosity*, an "Eastern spectacle" and "grand dramatic romance," with song, dance, and thrills and horrors of the mysterious Turkish castle, was a favorite at the Boston Museum. In 1843 New York's Olympic Theatre staged *Diana's Revenge, or, the Fate of Aetaeon*, "an Extravaganzical Burletta," with music and dance. In New York, transformation scenes had been employed in *The Enchanted Temple, or, The Spectre of the Nile* in 1855, by George L. Fox in *Planche, or the Lively Fairies* for Christmas 1856, and by Laura Keene in her "Birth of Cupid in the Bower of Ferns" in her production of *The Three Sisters* in 1860. However, *The Black Crook* added dance formations of women in skimpy dresses.

Controversy over the theatrical display of "nude" female bodies had smouldered for two decades. Foreign showmen were blamed for introducing corruption into the New World Eden. On the English stage, managers had for comic and dramatic effect cast women dressed provocatively in abbreviated men's costume that accentuated their figures. In the 1820s Madame Vestris became famous for her "breeches" roles in London, and since then Vestris imitators, provocatively cross-dressed, had become a subgenre of actresses. Americans were more circumspect—or pretended to be. None of this mattered to the fashionable who filled most of the three thousand seats nightly for an unprecedented four hundred and seventy-five consecutive performances of *The Black Crook*. The success encouraged look-alike productions—*The White Fawn*, also by Jarrett and Palmer, *The Devil's Auction, or The Golden Branch* (1866), and *The Crimson Shield, or Nymphs of the Rainbow* (1868).

All criticism of *The Black Crook* paled in comparison with the wave of English pantomime-spectaculars which triumphed in New York and Boston in 1868–72. Gone were the ballet dances and the transformation scenes; in

their stead was an all-female cast of strange Minotaurs, half men, half women, in men's roles. Lydia Thompson's Blondes were the agents of this new style. When it opened in London in 1863, *Ixion; or, The Man at the Wheel* had been thought a trivial, silly, but rather shocking, exploitation of women's bodies. The English critic John Ruskin, who saw *Ali Baba* at Covent Garden in 1867, was bewildered by the sheer silliness of the show. "The Forty Thieves were girls," he wrote. "The Forty Thieves and their forty companions were in some way mixed up with almost forty hundred and forty fairies, who were girls. There was an Oxford and Cambridge boat-race, in which the Oxford and Cambridge men were girls."[4] But when *Ixion* crossed the Atlantic a few years later, in its wake also came in swift succession, *Ernani; or, The Horn of a Dilemma*, then *Field of the Cloth of Gold*, then *The Forty Thieves; or, Striking Oil in Family Jars*, then *Robinson Crusoe*, then *Sinbad the Sailor; or, The Ungenial Genii and the Cabin Boy*, then *Robin Hood; or, The Maid That Was Arch and The Youth That Was Archer*. The mocking tone and blatant sexuality of the English shows was more "dangerous," the *New York Times* claimed, than *The Black Crook:* "Its object is to upset decorum, to upset gravity, to disarm judgment, and to intoxicate the senses."[5] The Blondes not only exposed their legs but by burlesquing masculine behavior, exposed fragile male egos.

By the turn of the century, burlesque had a new and popular meaning, not as satire of well-known drama, but as a show of scantily dressed or undressed women. Late in life, Lydia Thompson complained of the vulgar tone she had found by the late 1880s. "When I first crossed the Atlantic for the six consecutive seasons I played here ladies and children were my greatest patrons," she explained to an American journalist. "But now when the word burlesque is put up men are the first patrons."[6]

The "leg show" had a divided legacy. If it generated the tawdry cheap "burlesque house" and the seedy Earl Carroll *Vanities* of the 1920s, it also inspired—with European sophistication added via Parisian revues—the glittering and costly Ziegfeld *Follies* fantasies of 1907–30. Perhaps the most unlikely offshoot was the Turkish harem floorshow for suburban shoppers. "Spectacular extravaganzas" were a feature of the elegant turn-of-the-century department stores. To promote retail sales, New York's Siegal-Cooper, like other large metropolitan stores, had become a general service center, offering club-room facilities, amenities, and entertainment, especially for women customers. In its elegant music auditorium on the fifth floor, it advertised and hosted free afternoon concerts twice a week in season. For 1903 its grand themed event was the "Carnival of Nations." During "Oriental Week," it presented *Phantasma, the Enchanted Bower,* with a "glimpse of the Orient—a Turkish harem, a parade of Turkish dancing girls, a'genie of the lamp,' and 'Cleopatra of the Nile.'" The next year, Siegal-Cooper's held the *Amazma*

Show, with "weird transformations," "startling and beautiful electrical displays," and "incandescent illusions."[7] The shows might be only a fraction of the length of *The Black Crook*, but the setting of luxury and privilege—carpets, chandeliers, marbled interiors, liveried attendants—imitated the elegant fantasy of Niblo's Garden.

The Black Crook

The origins of *The Black Crook* lay in a speculative theatrical venture. Two New York entrepreneurs, Henry C. Jarrett, a young and ambitious producer, and his business partner Henry Palmer, believed that a big-budget musical show would be highly successful. They planned a visual feast of female dancers in a multi-media production with the most modern special effects. The gamble was no mere whim: European pantomime and opera had proved enduringly popular in the United States. In the 1850s the French troupe known as the Ravels and the Marinetti Family had combined acrobatic skills with pantomime, and they toured throughout the country with great success. However, few large ballet troupes had crossed the Atlantic. A grand spectacular with European cachet was still a novelty. Jarrett and Palmer toured London, Paris, Berlin, and Milan, offering high salaries to trained ballerinas. They purchased three hundred of the most expensive costumes from French designers and shipped one hundred and ten tons of the most elaborate scenery and the latest stage machinery from London technicians.

Now, all the producers needed was a production. They had vague plans to present one of the currently popular English or French spectacles at New York's prestigious Academy of Music. When that theater burned down, they formed a partnership with William Wheatley, the manager of Niblo's Garden. A profusion of trapdoors, a deep pit for a water tank, large plate-glass mirrors, a vast network of wires to support airborne fairies, and reconstruction of the entire backstage were needed to accommodate the special-effects machinery imported from London. Even with Niblo's huge stage, these necessary changes cost fifty thousand dollars.

Joseph Whitton claimed that his account, written thirty years after *The Black Crook* opened in New York, was the only true record. As the controller of finances at Niblo's Garden theater, and the aide closest to Wheatley, only he had had intimate knowledge of the production. The title of Whitton's pamphlet referred to a hostile sermon, "The Nuisances of New York, Particularly The Naked Truth," preached by the Rev. Charles B. Smyth on November 18, 1866, which, when reported by the hostile *Herald* newspaper, gave the show notoriety—and its most effective publicity.

Joseph Whitton, *"The Naked Truth:" An Inside History of the Black Crook* (Philadelphia: H. W. Shaw, 1897), [5]–6, 10, 32.

Early in the summer of '66 Messrs. Jarrett & Palmer—the wide-famed theatrical managers and speculators of those days—returned from Europe, whose principal cities they had ransacked in search of some gigantic attraction with which to dazzle and monopolize the attention of American theatre-goers and draw enough dollars from their pockets to comfortably line their own.

After ripe deliberation they decided that a Grand Ballet would be the proper thing. Jarrett's reasons for this were cogent, and his argument—as coming events were to prove—thoroughly sound. ''Legs are staple articles, and will never go out of fashion while the world lasts. They top the list of the 'Beauties of Nature,' and we will gather an array of them that will make even the surfeited New Yorker open his eyes and his pocket and hold his breath in astonishment.''

Upon this line the cunning managers began their work. The most accomplished artistes and the prettiest women were picked from the leading theatres of London, Paris, Berlin, and Milan. No Ballet so complete in its *ensemble*, and with so ravishing a collection of the ''Beauties of Nature,'' was ever before seen, or, if it were, certainly not by cisatlantic eyes.

The Ballet being completed, the next care of the managers was the costumes. These they had made in Paris, and with no regard to cost. The most expensive satins and silks were used, provided the needed effect and gorgeousness could not be obtained without them. No brummagem, no cheap sheen of paper-muslin, so long relied upon by the old-time economic manager to cheat the eyes of his patrons. All a true dream of splendor, a picture of glittering reality, to be hereafter displayed in a frame of bewildering enchantment.

Wheatley showed Whitton the manuscript of a minor dramatist, Charles M. Barras.

Patiently did I devote myself to the task, and soon saw, what Wheatley had already seen, that here was the very piece to fit the Ballet—a clothes-line, as it were, on which to hang the pretty dresses, besides affording abundant opportunities for scenic display. True, there was no originality in the plot—if it had a plot at all—[but] . . . originality was matter of little moment. It was just the wanted piece in every other respect, and if the plot had no originality, the title certainly had enough of it to insure, as I thought, the success of the play. . . .

I have said nothing of the literary merits of the *Crook*, for the best of reasons—it had none. This, however, is no serious fault. Elegant writing, with its daintily picked words and smooth-flowing sentences, is all well enough in its place; but that place is not in the drama of this prosy, money-grabbing age. The playgoer doesn't relish it. What he wants is something to please his eye and tickle his ear—something to strangle his cares and cut the throat of his troubles—something to make him laugh and forget he has a note to pay to-morrow, with no money to meet it. This is what he is after, and shrewd managers will show their shrewdness by accommodating him.

The sights and sounds and comedy of *The Black Crook* were its real glory. There were many subplots. Amina loves the impoverished artist Rodolphe but is matched by her stepmother Dame Barbara with the rich Count Wolfenstein. To restore his fading magical powers, the sorcerer Hertzog (known as the Black Crook because of his hunched or "crooked" back, and not for robbery and crime), makes a pact with the evil Zamiel to deliver a fresh soul to the devil every year. Rodolphe rescues Stalacta, the Fairy Queen, when she is trapped in the form of a dove, and is rewarded with precious jewels in the grotto. There are many comic characters, notably Carline, Barbara's impudent maid, and Greppo, first Hertzog's "drudge" and then Rodolphe's companion, and von Puffengruntz, Barbara's fat suitor. Comedy and fantastic scenes and "fairy" dances in the grotto predominate.

Act II, scene 4, introduces the fairies in the grotto, an excuse for songs and dances and a display of showy glitter. There were fishes swimming, a sea monster, a boat sinking, child-fairies asleep in shells, gems glittering on the foreshore. Theater-goers were astonished. The *Tribune* questioned its dramatic purpose but conceded that "Scenic Art has never, within our knowledge, been so amply and splendidly exemplified." *Spirit of the Times* praised as "absolutely miraculous" the "voluptuous moving forms, with the rocks and trees and babbling waters, the gorgeous caves and grottoes, the gems and gold of fairy land, the bewildering maze of all that is dazzlingly beautiful."[8]

Charles M. Barras, *The Black Crook, An Original, Magical and Spectacular Drama in Four Acts* (Chicago: Rounds and James, 1866), 28–30; *The Black Crook and Other Nineteenth-Century American Plays*, ed. Myron Matlaw (New York: Dutton, 1966), 349–63, 373–74.

The grotto of Golden Stalactites. A grand and comprehensive water-cavern of gold, deeply perspective, with stalactiform, arched roof. Vistas, running parallel and harmonizing with the main Grotto, the mouth of which discloses an open lake and distant shore at back. Transparent silver waters, in which are seen sporting fishes and nondescript amphibea. Diminutive fairies asleep on the waters of the Grotto in golden shells. Ground—or shore—piece, richly studded with gold and jewels. Masses of emerald and gold, upon and at the foot of which are reclining gnomes and amphibea.

Fairies asleep in poses. The moon, seen through the opening at back and over the distant shore of the lake, shows red upon its face at opening of scene.

Music.

DRAGONFIN, *who has been asleep on a jeweled mass on the shore, slowly awakens, rises and stretches himself. Upon turning, he sees the red upon the face of the moon.*

Music—chord.

DRAGONFIN. (*Uttering a cry of alarm.*) Awake. Awake.

(*Music—hurry. Gnomes and amphibea spring to their feet. Fairies and water nymphs enter hurriedly. Diminutive sprites in shells and fairies in poses, awaken.*)

Behold, there's blood upon the face of the moon—our Queen's in danger! To arms, to arms!

(*Music. The sprites in the shells disappear. The gnomes, amphibea and fairies rush off and immediately re-enter armed, the first-named with knotted clubs and tridents, the fairies with javelins. During the action the red disappears from the face of the moon, and it resumes its natural color.*)

(*Seeing the change.*) Stay—'tis past. Hark.

(*Queen* STALACTA *is heard singing beneath the waters. All bend forward and listen to her song.*)

(*After song.*) 'Tis she, our queen.

(*All kneel. Music.* STALACTA *rises from the waters and steps on shore, assisted by* DRAGONFIN.)

STALACTA. Arise, my loving subjects.

(*All rise.*)

DRAGONFIN. (*Pantomimes.*) Mistress, but now the light in yon great sapphire died out and stains of blood flushed in the face of the pale moon. You have 'scaped some deadly peril.

STALACTA. Thou art right. Listen, all. Tonight, while wandering in the fastnesses of the Hartz, without my protecting talisman, I heedlessly trod within one of the charmed circles of our enemy, the arch-fiend Zamiel.

ALL. Ha!

STALACTA. On the instant I was transformed into a white dove with shorn pinions. From beneath the rank leaves of an adder-plant glided a huge serpent. Its eyes were burning coals, its tongue a living flame. I was paralysed with fear and powerless to move. Nearer and nearer it came. I felt its stifling breath displace the purer air—I saw its venomed fangs glistening in the pale moonlight. Rising from out its deadly coil preparing itself to strike, when suddenly a youth, a mortal, strangely present in that wild, weird spot, seeing the danger of the trembling bird, seized a dead bough, which chance had fashioned like a Holy Cross, and smote the foul thing dead. Then he bore me safely from the charmed spot and gave me life and liberty.

DRAGONFIN. Revenge, revenge on the minions of Zamiel! (*Goes quietly off.*)

ALL. Revenge—revenge!

STALACTA. Nay, let no thought other than of joy mingle with this happy time. Remember, 'tis my natal hour, and I would have it, as in the past, a festal one. Let the invisible harmonies of this our realm breathe sweetest concord only.—And you, bright Crystaline, with your fair sisters, chase with flying feet the silver hours. (*Seats herself on bank.*)

(*Music. The Fairies form for dance. After the first pose, a loud, prolonged warning note, as if from a shell, is heard outside. All start in alarm, and hold the attitude of listening. The sound is repeated.*)

(*Music—hurry. The pose is broken and the fairies, gnomes and amphibea, the latter seizing their arms, form in alarm on either side. DRAGONFIN appears quickly.*)

STALACTA. (*who at the first sound has sprung to her feet.*) Speak, what danger threatens?

DRAGONFIN. The sentinel shells, played upon by the watchful winds, give alarm. Two daring mortals, armed with the enchanted magnet of the Black Crook, approach the secret entrance. Already they have passed the white whirlpool in safety. They come to despoil our realm of its glittering wealth.

STALACTA. Fear not, the talisman they bear is powerless against the spells that guard the portal.

ALL. Ho-ho-ho!

(*Echoes without and above. Music. Chorus—by gnomes, amphibea and fairies.*)

"Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice!
Sprites of the golden realm, rejoice.
Daring mortals mock our power
Flushed with the drink that the heart makes bold
They madly rush on the fatal hour.
Dark spells arise! Smite their longing eyes
That they never may gaze on the glittering prize!
Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice!
Sprites of the golden realm rejoice!

STALACTA. My faithful subjects—your Queen commends your zeal with which you would guard from mortal sight our beauteous realm. But ere these rash intruders perish, I would gratify a strange desire. Speed hence, good Dragonfin. Catch me their shadows from the bosom of the moon-lighted lake and cast them upon my faithful mirror. I would look upon them ere they fade forever.

(*Music.* DRAGONFIN *prostrates himself before* STALACTA, *springs into the water and disappears.*)

Begin the spell!

(*Music. This is either spoken by her or sung by fairy-chorus.*)

"Mortal shadows dimly cast
By the moonbeams' mystic ray
On the bosom of the lake
Hither, hither, fly away,
Flitting through the silver sheen
Come at summons of our Queen
Guardian spirits, let them pass,
Cast their shadows on the glass."

(Music. DRAGONFIN *springs from the water, and after prostrating himself before the Queen, rises and points to the water.)*

(Music. Fairies wave their wands. A small arched-headed frame of gold and coral stalactites rises at the distant entrance of the Grotto, showing small figures of RODOLPHE

and GREPPO *in boat, the former at the prow, gazing anxiously forward, the latter aft, in the attitude of paddling.*)

(STALACTA *who turns when the picture is fully shown. Chord of music.)*

(*Starting.*) Ha—'tis he! He must not perish. Invisible spirits, avert this peril.

''Shades of mortals hovering near
Join your masters—disappear.''

(*Music—hurry. The mirror and figures quickly sink.*)

Dragonfin, come hither. Fly with swiftest speed to the rocks beneath the waters of the guarded entrance. When the frail bark which now approaches shall be rent asunder by the relentless spells that guard our realm, be it your task to snatch from death these daring mortals and bear them safely hither.

ALL. (*All start forward inquiringly, exclaiming.*) Mistress!

STALACTA. Nay, question me not, away, away,
Slaves of my power, obey, obey.

(*Music—hurry.* DRAGONFIN *bows low, springs into the water and disappears.*)

(*Music. A small boat, with two mechanical figures or small doubles of* RODOLPHE *and* GREPPO *as they appeared in the mirror, appears from the distant entrance of the cavern, and moves very slowly across. When it reaches the center it sinks at the sound of the gong and flash of lightning at back.*)

(*Music—hurry. All the gnomes, amphibea, etc., utter exclamations of delight and indulge in extravagant antics, until checked by a gesture from* STALACTA.)

(*Soft Music.* DRAGONFIN *rises slowly from the water, supporting on either side* RODOLPHE and GREPPO, *the latter gulping and grasping violently for breath as his head appears. They step on shore,* RODOLPHE *and* GREPPO *lost in bewilderment.* DRAGONFIN *bows low before* STALACTA. *The other amphibea and gnomes make a demonstration of attack.*)

(*Stepping between.*) Forbear! Who moves again 'till I alone command shall perish.

(*They retire.*)

RODOLPHE. (*Rubbing his eyes.*) Is this a phantasm—this glittering gold, yon flashing gems, these strange fantastic shapes? Have I then passed the portal of an unknown world, or am I dreaming?

STALACTA. Welcome, brave mortal, to our bright domain. And you, my subjects, know and greet your Queen's preserver.

(*Music. Gnomes and amphibea cluster around* RODOLPHE *and* GREPPO, *rolling at their feet and indulging in various grateful antics, after which the fairies surround them and evince their delight.*)

RODOLPHE. (*Still bewildered.*) If this indeed be not a dream, tell me, Bright Being, you whose simple motion seems to sway the moves and passions of this Elfin Band, who art thou, and where am I?

STALACTA. I am called Stalacta, Queen of this dazzling realm. The glittering wonders that assail thine eyes are not creations of phantastic dreams but nature's handiwork, wrought with the cunning fingers in a bounteous mood.

GREPPO. (*Who has picked up a large mass of gold at the back, comes forward.*) 'Tis true, 'tis true. Behold the shining nugget.

STALACTA. Who is thy droll companion?

RODOLPHE. My simple henchman, a faithful guide and servitor.

STALACTA. I bid him welcome, for his master's sake.

GREPPO. Thanks, thanks, your Resplendent Majesty, thanks, thanks.

RODOLPHE. You spoke of service done; have we then met before?

STALACTA. Yes, once.

RODOLPHE. Indeed? When?

STALACTA. This very night.

RODOLPHE. Tonight?

STALACTA. Tonight, in the glen of firs, but not as now—then, a poor, weak, fluttering, charm-encompassed bird, you snatched me trembling from the jaws of death, broke the dark spell of transformation, and gave to me the priceless boon of liberty.

RODOLPHE. I do remember—

GREPPO. And so do I. Phew, how the sparks flew when Master smashed the head of the scaly monster, and such a smell of brimstone, I do believe it was one of Beelzebub's own imps in disguise.

STALACTA. Again thou art welcome. This is my natal hour. Wilt view the sports of this, our carnival?

RODOLPHE. Most willingly.

STALACTA. And while the revels proceed, thou shalt tell me thy story.

(*Music—ballet. Seats are brought forward by amphibea.* STALACTA *and* RODOLPHE *sit.* GREPPO *amuses himself with* DRAGONFIN. *Gnomes and amphibea present him from time to time with nuggets of gold and jewels, which he thrusts into his pockets until they become greatly distended, during which action the diminutive sprites reappear in shells* on *the water, floating to and fro, fishing. The fairies form for dance. Grand ballet action by principals and full corps de ballet, during which the fishers in the shells are seen to catch small silver fish.*)

GREPPO. (*After the dance terminates.*) Ha, ha. Dancing. All very well in its way. But there's the sport for me, fishing! Look, Master, look. See the little rogues hook the silly shiners. Oh, if there is one thing in the world I love more than another, it is fishing—such fun to feel the greedy rascals snatch and see them wriggle. There's another—oh, I can't stand it any longer! Fishing is like the measles, it's catching. (*Turning to amphibea and gnomes.*) Would any of you handsome gentlemen oblige me with a spare hook and line.

(DRAGONFIN *nods assent and brings him rod and line.*)

Well, upon my word! I am very much obliged to your Scaly Magnificence. I'll do as much for you someday. By the way, is your Amphibious Majesty fond of fish? (DRAGONFIN *nods affirmatively.*)

What kind?

(DRAGONFIN, *business of indicating that he likes large ones.*)

Like large ones, eh? All right, I'll make you a present of the first ten-pounder that I catch.

(*Music. He fishes from the shore and catches two small fishes, the last quite diminutive. Amphibea, gnomes and fairies laugh boisterously as each fish is drawn forth.*)

(*Coming down, chapfallen.*) Pshaw—mere sprats and sardines—not my kind at all. This is too much like taking advantage of confiding innocence. (*To* DRAGONFIN.) Couldn't your Finny Excellency oblige me with a more tempting bait, something that would seduce some big, greedy, wiggly, waggly fellow, into taking a nibble? (DRAGONFIN *nods affirmatively. Music.* DRAGONFIN *goes to the margin of the water and draws forth a large crab, which he places on the hand of* GREPPO. *It seizes him by the fingers to the great delight of the amphibea, gnomes and fairies. He struggles frantically to extricate himself, and is finally released by* DRAGONFIN, *who baits the hook with the crab and gives him the rod and line.*)

(*Taking* DRAGONFIN *apart confidentially.*) I don't know about this. Excuse me for asking a question, but as an unprejudiced observer, don't you think this style of bait more likely to bite the fish than the fish to bite the bait?

(DRAGONFIN *shakes his head and indicates that a large fish will take it.*)

All right. Here goes then.

(*Music. He casts the line into the water. A moment after it is violently seized and a frantic struggle ensues, during which he is nearly drawn overboard two or three times. Suddenly an amphibious monster springs from the water and pursues* GREPPO *around, off and on the stage to the great delight of the amphibea, gnomes and fairies, who indulge in boisterous laughter.*)

(GREPPO, in *his terror, throws himself at the feet of* STALACTA *for protection. She rises and waves her hand. The monster retires and is pacified by* DRAGONFIN.)

GREPPO. (*Coming forward.*) Really, my fishy-fleshy friend, you must excuse me. I beg ten thousand pardons. I hadn't the remotest idea in the world that any of you bottle-green gentlemen were lying around loose on the bottom, watching for a supper of raw crabs. Indeed I hadn't. (*The monster growls and makes a start at him.*) (*Music.* DRAGONFIN *interposes and pacifies the monster. by patting him on the back. Then, taking its hand, passes it into that of* GREPPO.)

GREPPO. (*Shaking the monster's hand cordially.*) All right, I accept your apology. (*Then turning to* DRAGONFIN.) Now you're what I call a true friend—a friend in need, you stick by a fellow when he hasn't the courage to stick by himself. This is the second time you've done me a service. Once in saving me from too much water and now in saving me from too much luck, and I'll let you see that I can be grateful. You like fish?

(DRAGONFIN *nods affirmatively.*)

GREPPO (*passing the monster over to him.*) Consider him yours.

(*All the amphibea, gnomes and fairies laugh and go up.*)

STALACTA. (*Rising and leading* RODOLPHE *forward.*) Thy story claims for thee my pity and my aid.

RODOLPHE. And Hertzog the Black Crook—

STALACTA. Is a vile sorcerer whose dark, unhallowed spells were wrought for thy destruction.

RODOLPHE. How?

STALACTA. Beneath the entrance to this charmed spot, intertwined amid the branches of the coraline, are whole hecatombs of human bones, the whitened relics of adventurous mortals who like thyself have sought the realm. Until tonight no human eye has ever seen the dazzling splendor of this wondrous dome. No human footsteps save thine own and his who follows thee have ever pressed these sands of gold. Had not thy coming been to me foreshadowed and all my power been interposed to snatch thee from the impending doom, then thou too had'st joined the hapless throng that mouldering lies beneath yon depths.

RODOLPHE. Then is thy debt to me already paid.

STALACTA. Not so—I am still thy debtor and must ever be. Thou art environed by danger and need the power of my protection. Return unto the outer world again, thy happiness is there. She whom thou lovest is worthy of thy love, therefore return.

RODOLPHE. Amina, dear Amina.

STALACTA. In the secret cell of these caverns, whose walls are solid gold, lie countless hoards of richest treasure, gleaned for ages by the tireless gnomes. In the crystal depths of these waters sparkle gems richer by far than human eyes have ever gazed upon. Of these thou shalt bear with thee the choicest. Behold my gift.

(*Music. A jeweled stalactiform etagere with strong light from calcium falling upon it rises in front of ground-piece, bearing upon its different shelves rich vases filled with gold and various-colored jewels which* DRAGONFIN, *gnomes, and amphibea remove, performing a series of grotesque evolutions to marked music. Etagere sinks—after which music.* STALACTA wa*ves her wand; a golden boat studded with jewels glides on.*)

This bark, protected by a potent spell, shall bear thee safely to your neighboring shore. My faithful gnomes shall he thy treasure bearers. But ere we part, take thou this jeweled circlet. *(Gives him a ring from her finger.)* Should danger threaten—as perchance it will, for baffled malice has a thousand stings—press but thy lips upon the gem and thou wilt find me by thy side.

(*Music.* RODOLPHE *kneels and kisses her hand. She raises him.*)

Farewell.

(*Music. He slips into the boat.* GREPPO, *bearing a large mass of gold, affectionately embraces* DRAGONFIN, *shakes hands with the gnomes and amphibea, kisses the fairies, bows low to* STALACTA *and gets into the boat. A dolphin, glittering in green and gold, rises from waters with principal danseuse bearing a vase of treasure; other dolphins float with diminutive sprites bearing treasure. Copious shower of gold, the other sprites on the water catching the flakes in shells of silver. Poses by gnomes, amphibea and fairies. The whole scene brilliantly lighted. Slow curtain.*)

ACT III Scene 1

A lapse of six months.

Illuminated gardens of Wolfenstein by moon-light, with terrace and illuminated castle at back. This scene, standing as it does the entire act, should be elaborate and beautiful.

Music.

Masqueraders in ball costumes discovered promenading. Grand Ballet divertissement, after which the masquers gradually disappear at different entrances.

Enter from the terrace DAME BARBARA, *masked, falutingly dressed and carrying a huge fan. She is followed by* CARLINE.

BARBARA. (*Unmasking and coming forward.*) Phew, what a relief. Thank the saints his Countship's birthday comes but once a year. Another such festival would be the death of me. Ah! I'm stewed, fried, broiled and roasted. (*Fans herself vigorously.*)

CARLINE. (*Aside.*) And still as tough as Dame Gretchen's gander, what was twenty-one last Easter. (*Aloud.*) Why, Madam Barbara, I thought you enjoyed it.

BARBARA. So I do, child, so I do; particularly the masquerading. One has so many pleasant things whispered in one's ear; but I can't say so much for the waltzing. It's such a terrible thing to take the starch out of one's linen.

CARLINE. La, Madam Barbara, what's a little starch? Nothing. If I waltzed as gracefully as you (BARBARA *makes a gesture of satisfaction.*) and had such an inviting waist—(BARBARA *pinches her waist.*)—I'd keep at it until I was as limp as a boiled cabbage leaf.

BARBARA. Then you—you think me graceful, eh?

CARLINE. (*Aside.*) As a hippopotamus. (*Aloud.*) As a sylph. You were the envy of all the ladies and the admiration of all the other sex. Did you notice that courtly gentleman in the blue mask?

BARBARA. And what of him?

CARLINE. Nothing, only he was frantic to get an introduction to you.

BARBARA. No! Was he?

CARLINE. Yes indeed, Madam. And when his Lordship, the Count, engaged the lady Amina for a moment, he turned to me and slipping a golden crown into my palm with one hand, pressing his heart with the other and pointing to you with the other, asked with a sweet, sighing, silvery voice, trembling with emotion: ''Who is that lovely being?''

BARBARA. No—did he?

CARLINE. Yes indeed, Madam. (*Aside.*) The saints forgive me for lying. (*Aloud.*) And Mynheer von Puffengruntz, who overheard him, turned pea-green with jealousy.

BARBARA. (*Fanning herself and pressing her hand upon her heart.*) Be still, little trembler, be still. I declare, my silly heart is fluttering like a poor little starling in a gold cage.

CARLINE. (*Aside.*) More like a big buzzard in a steel trap.

BARBARA. Carline, take my fan, child. (*Gives it.*) The exertion will make my complexion too ruddy.

CARLINE. So it will, Madam, and ruddy complexions are not genteel—allow me. (*Fans her vigorously.*)

BARBARA. Not so violent, girl, you'll disarrange my hair. Gently, very gently, a sort of sportive zephyr.

CARLINE. I understand. Madam. You want a mild sort of tickling sensation. something like one feels on one's neck when a gentleman whispers in one's ear—

BARBARA. (*Languidly.*) Y-e-s. (*Sighs.*) And he called me a—a—what did he call me?

CARLINE. A swan-like creature. (*Aside.*) A goose.

BARBARA. (*Sighs.*) Who can he be, I wonder.

CARLINE. Nobody appears to know exactly. I heard his Lordship, the Count, whisper to the Baron von Stuffencram that he suspected the mysterious blue mask to be no other than the young prince Leopold.—Once, while dancing, his domino came open at the breast and I saw a collar of jewels fit for an emperor. However, as everybody is to unmask at the grand banquet, we will then know all about him.

BARBARA. Eh, what, the Prince Leopold?

CARLINE. So his Lordship, the Count, thinks.

BARBARA. Why, he is already affianced, as everybody knows, to the young Princess Frederica.

CARLINE. Dear me, so he is—how unfortunate.

BARBARA. Poor young man—how I pity him. What a terrible thing it is to be of royal blood and not have the liberty to choose for one's self. Heigh-ho! I know it is a sad, cruel, wicked thing to blight a young and budding affection, but as the right honorable foster-mother that-*is*-to-be of her right honorable Ladyship that-is-to-be, I mustn't encourage his highness in a hopeless passion. (*Displays herself.*)

(*Enter* VON PUFFENGRUNTZ.)

VON PUFFENGRUNTZ. (*At back, admiringly.*) There she is! What a grace, what a dignity, what a walk. (*Coming forward.*) Ah-a-a.

BARBARA. (*Sighing.*) There's another victim to love's cruel dart; my fan, child.

CARLINE. (*Giving it.*) Be careful, use it gently, Madam. Remember your complexion. (*Aside.*) What a lovely couple—powder and puff.

VON PUFFENGRUNTZ. (*Aside.*) What a golden opportunity. (*Aloud.*) Young woman, as I left the grand hall I heard your mistress asking for you.

CARLINE. (*Aside.*) Of course, I understand—cunning old walrus. (*Aloud.*) May I retire, Madam?

BARBARA. Yes. certainly, child, that is, if her Ladyship requires you. (*Coquettes with her dress, etc.*)

CARLINE. (*Aside.*) I thought so, willing old pelican. She's beginning to dress her feathers already. Never mind. I shall have another flirtation with the prince's equerry, the drollest and most agreeable fellow in the world, and *such* a rogue. (*Exits.*)

(VON PUFFENGRUNTZ *gazes admiringly at* BARBARA *and sighs*.)

BARBARA. (*Casting sidelong glances at him*.) Heigh-ho! There he is. My charms tonight have completed the conquest. He is fast-bound in the bonds of rosy cupid. I see a proposal in one eye and a marriage settlement in the other. But I mustn't draw him in too suddenly. These men are like trout; they must be played with a little.

VON PUFFENGRUNTZ. Full moon of the festival, why have you so cruelly robbed the grand hall of your light, and left us to grope about in the dull glimmer of the sickly stars?

BARBARA. Don't talk to me about moonshine and sickly stars, you heartless, gay deceiver.

VON PUFFENGRUNTZ. Deceiver?

BARBARA. Deceiver! Didn't I see you gallivanting with the Fraulein von Skragneek, the rich Burgomaster's daughter?

VON PUFFENGRUNTZ. Politeness, my dear Madam Barbara, merely politeness, on my honor. The fact is I—I had the misfortune to tread on the lady's favorite bunion, and what you mistook for tenderness was only an apology—an apology, believe me, my dear Madam Barbara, only an apology.

BARBARA. Oh, you men, you deceiving men! You are always ready with an excuse.

VON PUFFENGRUNTZ. On the honor of a von Puffengruntz, I swear I speak the truth. The Fraulein von Skragneek indeed! Haven't I got eyes? Ah, cruel fair one, compared with her and all others, you are as the stately sunflower in a meadow of dandelions. As—as the queenly holly-hock in a garden of chickweed.

(*Music—tremulo-piano*.)

(DRAGONFIN, *ascends quickly, steps forward and listens*.)

BARBARA. (*Aside*.) It's coming at last. I know it's coming. (*Pressing her heart*.) What a strange flutter. I hope I'm not going to faint. Dear me, what poor weak, silly creatures we are. I must nerve myself for the trying occasion. How fortunate it is that I happen to have my smelling-salts about me. (*Draws flask from her pocket, turns her back to* VON PUFFENGIRUNTZ, *and drinks*.)

VON PUFFENGRUNTZ. (*Aside*.) She's moved. She's overcome with emotion. She turns to hide her blushes. She yields, and now, like a conqueror, I'll gather in the fruits of victory.

(*He kneels with difficulty at the feet of* BARBARA. *His face is half-averted, and he is about to take her hand, when* DRAGONFIN *glides quietly back of and between them, extends his left hand to* VON PUFFENGRUNTZ *and takes* BARBARA's *in the other. They both sigh.* VON PUFFENGRUNTZ *squeezes the hand of* DRAGONFIN, *who shakes with* sup*pressed laughter*.)

Poor, frightened thing, how she trembles.

BARBARA. (*Aside*.) Dear me, how strangely the tender passion affects him. He's shaking like an aspen and his hand is as cold as ice.

VON PUFFENGRUNTZ. Bewitching siren, listen to the voice of love.

BARBARA. Oh, Mynheer von Puffengruntz, how can you?

VON PUFFENGRUNTZ. Don't call me von Puffengruntz. Call me Maximilian, call me your Maximilian. (*Squeezes* DRAGONFIN'*s hand.* DRAGONFIN *squeezes* BARBARA'*s hand*.)

BARBARA. Oh, don't, you naughty man, you—you hurt my hand.

VON PUFFENGRUNTZ. No, did I? Queen of Love and Beauty, then let me heal the bruise.

(*Kisses the hand of* DRAGONFIN *rapturously, who, at the same time kisses* BARBARA's.)

And now that I've healed it, let me call it mine. (*Looks for the first time attentively at the hand; continues the inspection up the arm until he encounters the grinning face of* DRAGONFIN, *when in speechless terror he drops the hand, makes various floundering attempts to regain his feet and exits, hurriedly*.)

BARBARA. (*Aside*.) Shall I keep him a little longer with Cupid's dart sticking in his bosom, or shall I end his misery. (*Aloud*.) Ahem, you'll—you'll never be a naughty boy again?

(DRAGONFIN *squeezes her hand*.)

And you'll promise never to tread on the Fraulein von Skragneek's favorite bunion.

(DRAGONFIN *squeezes her hand*.)

(*Aside*.) Poor fellow, joy has made him speechless, he can only answer with a squeeze of the hand. (*Aloud*.) Well then, Maximilian, I'm yours! (*Falls into* DRAGONFIN's *arms; looks up into his face*.)

(*Music. She utters a piercing scream and rushes off*.)

(DRAGONFIN *imitates and indulges in extravagant antics until music changes—when he starts, inclines his ear to the ground and listens—rises, moves cautiously, starts, points off, shakes his clenched hand threateningly, and quickly disappears*.)

HERTZOG. (*Entering hurriedly and disturbed*.) Foiled, tricked, crossed in the hour of my victory! A life desperately played for and fairly won, snatched from the jaws of death. He lives, my chosen victim lives, and flushed with triumph and vast hoards of gold, stalks boldly forth to mock me. Oh, curse the interposing power that stepped between us, a withering palsy light upon her arm and blight and pestilence infect the air she breathes! Oh, impotent, oh driveling fool! To work, to work. A soul once tampered with must be pursued, not cast aside to tempt another, so runs the bond which I've sealed. 'Tis well, 'tis well. I'll track him as the sleuth-hound tracks the stag. He must, he *shall* be mine.

(*Music. Exit hurriedly*.)

(*March of Amazons*.)

ACT IV Scene 6

Pandemonium. ZAMIEL *in council, seated on an illuminated throne of skulls and flame. Lesser thrones, one occupied by* REDGLARE, *with pen and open book, another*

by a secretary, writing. At the foot of the central throne, two dwarf demon pages with wands, in attendance.

Music.

Fiends discovered in a chorus of demoniacal yells and fiendish laughter, dancing around a flaming chasm. After the action is continued a brief time, ZAMIEL *waves his scepter.*

Demons separate.

ZAMIEL. 'Tis well. Let silence reign awhile. How stands the record of the dying year? Has every seed brought sinful fruit? Is all the harvest gathered in—is every bond fulfilled?

REDGLARE. All—all save one.

ZAMIEL. Who plays the laggard.

REDGLARE. One who sought to rival thy great power—Hertzog, the Black Crook.

ALL THE FIENDS. Ho, ho, ho.

(*Echoed without and above, followed by a single wild blast of infernal music.*)

ZAMIEL. If when the brazen tongue of clamorous Time, now trembling on the midnight's verge, proclaims the appointed hour, the wail of no fresh soul by him betrayed breaks on the air of Hell, let him be summoned. (*Music.*)

(*The demons utter a wild wail of delight and resume the dance. The gong strikes twelve. At the first stroke, the demons cease dancing and hold separate pictures of exultation. At the termination of each stroke a single brazen blast of demoniacal music. At the twelfth stroke, loud and continued thunder. Demons utter a wild cry.* ZAMIEL *rises and waves his scepter.*)

(*If possible, the scene backs away and discloses vistas of Pandemonium teeming with infernal life and wreaths of flame, from which appear illuminated heads of demons, skeletons and nondescript monsters.*)

(*Gong sounds.* HERTZOG *is dragged on by Fiends, and is dashed into the flaming chasm. Demons howl and dance around.*)

Act IV Scene 7

Subterranean gallery of emerald and crystal stalactites.

Music.

Characteristic march. Grand procession of amphibea and gnomes bearing in their arms and upon their heads salvers, shells, and quaint vases filled with gold and jewels. They are followed by amazons in armor, led by STALACTA. *They march, double the march, and vary the evolutions, till the transformation is ready, when they exit and the scene breaks away to*

Act IV Scene 8

Music.

An elaborate mechanical and scenical construction of the Realms of STALACTA, *occupying the entire stage. This scene must be of gradually-developing and culminating*

beauty, introducing during its various transformations STALACTA, *the entire host of fairies, sprites, water nymphs, amphibea, gnomes, etc., bearing treasure.* RODOLPHE, AMINA, GREPPO *and* CARLINE.

Calcium lights, brilliant fires, and slow curtain.

In act I, scene 4, of *The Black Crook*, Carline, the village girl who becomes Amina's maid and companion, sings "You Naughty, Naughty Men" in Count Wolfenstein's castle. The English singer Milly Cavendish played Carline. The cheeky song of the battle of the sexes, typical of the English music hall, suited such a free spirit who delights in tricking and teasing the vain Dame Barbara.

The Black Crook Songster: a collection of choice, jolly and happy songs, now published for the first time: including "You naughty men!" as sung at Niblo's with great applause by the late Millie Cavendish (New York: R. M. De Witt, 1867?), 2–3.

You Naughty, Naughty Men (1866)

I will never more deceive you, nor of happiness bereave you,
But I'll die a maid to grieve you, oh! you naughty, naughty men;
You may talk of love, and sighing, say for us you're nearly dying;
All the while you know you're trying to deceive, you naughty men;
You may talk of love, and sighing, say for us you're nearly dying;
All the while you know you're trying to deceive, you naughty, naughty men.

When you want a kiss or favour, you put on your best behaviour,
And your looks of kindness savour, oh, you naughty, naughty men;
Of love, you set us dreaming, and when with hope we're teeming;
We find you are but scheming, you naughty, naughty men,
Of love you set us dreaming; and when with hope we're teeming;
We find you are but scheming, you naughty, naughty, naughty men.

If a fortune we inherit, you see in us every merit,
And declare we're girls of spirit, oh! you naughty, naughty men,
But too often, matrimony, is a mere matter of money,
We get bitters 'stead of honey, from you naughty, naughty men,
But too often, matrimony, is a mere matter of money,
We get bitters 'stead of honey, from you naughty, naughty men.

And when married how you treat us, and of each fond wish defeat us,
And some will even beat us, oh! you naughty, naughty men,
You take us from our mothers, from our sisters, and our brothers,
When you get us, flirt with others, oh! you cruel wicked men,
You take us from our mothers, from our sisters, and our brothers,
When you get us, flirt with others, oh! you cruel wicked men,

But with all your faults, we clearly, love you wicked fellows dearly,
Yes, we dote upon you dearly, oh! you naughty, naughty men,
We've no wish to distress you, we'd sooner far caress you,
And when kind we'll say, oh, bless you, oh! you naughty, dear, delightful men,
We've no wish to distress you, we'd sooner far caress you,
And when kind we'll say, oh, bless you, oh! you naughty, dear, delightful men.

A Burlesque of Burlesque

The Black Crook's triumph invited copycat productions and parodies. In the winter season of 1866–67, George Fox enlivened the traditional English pantomime *Humpty Dumpty* by adding original and playful flourishes that pleased the eye, most notably a roller-skating ballet. There were also many one-act burlesques. *The Black Crook, Jr.* competed with *The Black Rook*, *The Black Rook with a Crook*, *The Red Crook*, and *The White Crook*. Most minstrel troupes included small-scale spectacles with transformation scenes, and by mocking the original's pretensions to art, added to its fame. In February 1867, just five months after *The Black Crook* opened, George Griffin and George Christy performed one of the earliest burlesques of the new sensation. Like the original, it was essentially visual, relying on scenery and dance, and on blackface conventions for comic effect, and with a topical reference to the conflict between the president and Congress about Reconstruction. George Griffin was the author of countless, ephemeral minstrel afterpieces and sketches, few of which were published.

The Black Crook burlesque, written and arranged by G. W. H. Griffin, and performed by Griffin & Christy's minstrels, for a succession of ninety nights, at the Fifth avenue opera house, 2 and 4 West Twenty-fourth street, N. Y. (New York: Samuel French, n.d. [1870s?]).

THE BLACK CROOK BURLESQUE
written and arranged by G. W. H. GRIFFIN and performed by
GRIFFIN & CHRISTY'S MINSTRELS
for a succession of ninety nights, at the Fifth Avenue Opera House.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
WOLFGANG HEDGEHOG (Black Crook)
LUCIFER
MOLLY BONFANTI
BETSY REGALIA
LUCALICO
DUCKLEGS
RITALANDA SOMECALLUS

MISERY
GOSSIPER

SCENE I.

A wood—den of the BLACK CROOK. At rise of curtain, wild music, allegro.

(*Enter BLACK CROOK, Right. He is dressed in black tights, black blouse reaching to the knee, black belt, black shoes with buckles, black wig with hair standing in all directions. If done in blackface, the forehead should be washed clean with a sponge, leaving it perfectly white; rub a little of the black off from under the eyes, so as to give the face a wild expression. If done in white, the forehead must be painted green. He carries a cane to lean upon—it should be an old fashioned one with a cross piece for handle. He is nearly bent double as he enters leaning upon cane. He walks around two or three times, then stops in center of stage. Music stops.*)

BLACK CROOK. Now to conjure up the spell
That shall do my bidding well!
More of riches I must have,
More of pleasure still I crave.
But should the spell impotent prove,
While the sprites of earth I move,
Then my power on earth is done!
Then I'll invoke the Evil One!

(*Music repeats.* BLACK CROOK *takes cane and draws circle on stage, then uses cane in flourishes, as if invoking evil spirits. Music ceases.* BLACK CROOK *walks down left in despair, then putting his hand to his forehead, speaks:*)

BLACK CROOK. Alas! I fear I have no power
To aid me in this trying hour.
What shall I do? My brain grows wild.
And through the air on fire I ride!
I'll call to aid the Evil One,
He's just come on from Washington.
He'll aid me in my dire distress,
Then send me on to con-ge-ress!

(*Wild chord by the orchestra.* LUCIFER *appears, either through trap, or from right. Flash of lightning and sound of gong. He is dressed in red tights, with red hood on his head, and two horns. In his right hand he holds a scroll with which he points at* BLACK CROOK*, who shrinks from him in fear.*)

LUCIFER. Well, here I am! all right, you see,
Now what is it you want of me?
BLACK CROOK. *(creeps up to him).*
I want a dozen magic lamps,
To aid through life in picking up stamps.
LUCIFER. Thou hast thy wish, fool, even now,

The stamp of Cain is on thy brow.
Come, tell me what thou dost desire—
I'm getting cold without a fire.
BLACK CROOK. Well, then, I s'pose I must tell all,
The best of men will sometimes fall.
The people call me the ''Black Crook,''
Because I read the ''Magic Book.''
They've robbed me of my magic spell,
And now myself to you I'll sell.
LUCIFER. Out with it, knave! name the condition
On which you'll join me in perdition.
You are the kind I wish to see,
For such as you resemble me.
BLACK CROOK. Then, first, I want the privilege
To be the first on ''Broadway Bridge,''
Then I'd be pointed out to all,
As the young man, graceful and tall,
Who was the first to cross the street
Without wading through mud twelve inches deep.
LUCIFER. The first I grant! Now name the other,
Come, hurry up! I've no time to bother!
BLACK CROOK. Then first I'd know, as you're a resident,
About what time they'll impeach the President?
LUCIFER. Bosh!
BLACK CROOK. Another thing I wish you'd tell,
As you are bound to go to quell
Disturbance in this land of ours,
Who, at the next election, will hold the bowers?
LUCIFER. You shall know all, avaricious fool,
If you'll bring to me each year a soul;
Each year, when the clock strikes the hour of night,
A soul from you shall be my right.
BLACK CROOK. Enough! each year a ''sole'' I'll steal,
And with it bring you a toe and heel,
And, if your majesty it suits,
Next year I'll bring you a pair of ''boots.''
LUCIFER. 'Tis well, now I must be a going,
Methinks, I hear some ''rooster'' crowing;
Now don't forget, on land or sea,
That crooked trunk belongs to me.
(LUCIFER *vanishes Right through flame, of redfire.* BLACK CROOK *hobbles off Left.*)

SCENE II.

A garden.

"GRAND ENSEMBLE DE BALLET."

In this scene can be introduced as many Ballet Girls as you please; however, six or eight is the usual number. They are all dressed in burlesque style, excepting one, who is to be a good dancer in order to show a contrast between herself and the others. The ladies who compose the Grand Ballet are dressed in white gauze dresses, reaching nearly to the knee; without hoops. The waists are red or blue satin, abundantly stuffed to form immense bosom, large heavy shoes, white stockings stuffed, to form "big limbs" fashionable lady's wig, with tremendous waterfall, green wreaths upon the head.

At change of scene they come from all the entrances upon their toes, with hands elevated; moving to "slow music." Move around awkwardly for about thirty-two bars, then change to

SECOND MOVEMENT.—WALTZ BY BALLET.

THIRD MOVEMENT.

The leading dancer comes from Right, dressed in beautiful style, and executes LA ARIEL. Moving over to each corner alternately, and tending gracefully back, each Ballet Girl, as she approaches, strikes comical attitude. At end of dance she retires back.

FOURTH MOVEMENT.

LA SYLPHIDE *is burlesqued by one of the comedians, after which someone from the gallery throws a large cabbage, with large envelope stuck in it. Dancer takes it, kisses envelope, looks up at gallery, and puts envelope in his bosom.*

FIFTH MOVEMENT.—VILLAGE HORNPIPE—Burlesque.

SIXTH MOVEMENT.—LA BAYADEN—Burlesque.

SEVENTH MOVEMENT.—MAY POLE DANCE

MAN *brings on May Pole and holds it on stage—it has six strings of different colored muslin hanging from the top. Each Ballet Girl takes one, and they all dance* MAY POLE DANCE. *They finally get entangled in the muslin, winding up the man's head, &c., and all run off with May pole. Then immediately re-enter and form for the last scene.*

PALACE OF DEW DROPS.

With real water streaming from EMERALD FOUNTAINS. *Members of the "Corps de Ballet" form on each side of the stage in comical attitudes. Fancy Dancer is placed upon a soap box, Center. Two little demons, dressed in red, rush out from either side with pans of red fire, and form each side of Fancy Dancer, forming Tableaux on their knees, in front of stage. At each corner is placed two Irish women upon boxes, pouring water from green wateringpots into a tub. A string of stuffed legs, boots, strings of onions, little dolls, cabbages, old clothes, bottles, &c. is let down from above by means of a rope held by some one, and kept moving slowly up and down.* LUCIFER

and BLACK CROOK *swing off, holding onto ropes suspended from beams above. They swing back and forth. Music appropriate.*

THE END

Reactions to the Controversy

Writing sixty years later, Mabel Osgood Wright remembered fondly the elite circles in which her father Samuel Osgood moved as a prominent Unitarian minister to a wealthy congregation. "Better New York" remained loyal to opera and the theater throughout the Civil War, and the leading opera singers performed at private parties. "It was by way of the theatre, or the drama, as Father preferred to call it," she recalled, "that my longing for color, romance, and the beautiful things in life was first satisfied and unconsciously trained." The opening of *The Black Crook* at Niblo's posed a dilemma. The Osgoods were friends of the actor Edwin Booth, and Mabel's sister's fiancé was the nephew of Niblo's manager William Wheatley. Ministers, however, were overwhelmingly opposed to the scandalous European import.

Mabel Osgood Wright, *My New York* (New York: MacMillan, 1926), 124–26, 131–32.

The fuss was all about a new play that had been put on at Niblo's Garden that autumn, also as to whether [sisters] Bea and Gatha might go to see it, or if Father and Mother were reasonable to forbid them unless they first saw and judged the play for themselves and not by hearsay. The matter seemed very strange to me because our family always went to see plays when they had a chance. . . .

Hence the production of the daring *Black Crook* had more social ramifications than met the casual eye. Wives and mothers of sons frowned upon it, preachers railed against it. Conservative public opinion ran so high that for a time even Father was a bit shaken.

A lull followed the first discussion of our family's attendance, then came the crisis—a box at Niblo's Garden was sent Mother with Mr. Wheatley's compliments, at the same time that I, aged seven, was asked to go to a children's matinee party with Ross and Lawrence Miller. The box was declined for reasons of prudence, yet my sisters went with Brother George. It must have been a fairy spectacle and would have been taken only as such by a beauty-loving child, but as a line had to be drawn somewhere, it was drawn at me. However, I played *Black Crook* with Ross and Larrie Miller, for Mr. Wheatley sent them a miniature theatre with scenic backgrounds and all the characters of the play made of cardboard with colored costumes. As these figures were mounted on firm supports that did not wobble, we could make our own combinations and the amusement was endless. . . .

With the carefully preserved program of this play now before me, plus the mature vision that can look in many directions,—the social revolution that *The Black Crook*

caused in New York is clearly cut, though scarcely to be understood by those of a later generation. Yet even today this spectacular bill of the play will rival the announcements of a Hollywood thriller. . . .

New York in the sixties, strong for "the legitimate drama," was very young, as was all America, along lines of artistic staging. It was but a little over a century before that there had been a law against all acting in New England, which was not set aside until the seventeen-nineties, when an English company dared to appear in Boston, to be followed the next year by the opening of the Federal Street Theatre.

There was dramatic blood in my mother's line, for English-born Aunt Susanna Rowson, sister of Great-grandfather Haswell, not only acted in the Chestnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia, and the Federal Street Theatre, but wrote a play that was put on there called *Americans in England*.

Minstrelsy long had held its place and many of our best "legitimates" started life as "nigger minstrels," even Booth and [Joseph] Jefferson having had their turn at it, Jefferson making the Jim Crow song famous. But *The Black Crook* was New York's first absolute "Leg Show";—beautiful, novel and very well presented. But the crux of the whole matter was, judged from afar, that a barrier was broken down, never to he replaced, for it was then discovered that some of the dancers as well as actresses could personally be really fine women, whom several of the "sparks" (ancient for "Johnnies") took honorably to wife. Thus a precedent was set for all time.

It was found that nimble feet and shapely bodies may be topped by intelligence, keen wit and real morality. This had been fully realized in England when the daughter of a Presbyterian minister, Ada[h] Isaacs Menken, the Mazeppa against whom sermons were preached and virtuous eyes veiled, was capable of holding the loyal and aboveboard friendship of men of the intelligence of Dickens, Swinburne and the elder Dumas.

A little space ago I heard two veteran playgoers speaking of *The Black Crook*. In discussing this spectacle in comparison with the dancing of later days, it was only a certain crudeness of setting, that obtained everywhere in the theatre, which came under their criticism, not in any way the moral side. But New York Society then felt that such things belonged only to debased overseas countries, and not to its severe Republican purist New World. It was mistaken. Americans paid out one hundred thousand dollars of their good money in a little less than a year and a half to see the play it had tried to frown down, at the rate of one dollar and a half for the best single seat and ten dollars for a stage box. Yet the coming of these dancers and the following development and change of public opinion in New York was a species of moral and social revolution; for *The Black Crook* and its train broke into many families beside ours, with a crack akin to the storming of the front windows by a mob.

On January 29 1868, George Templeton Strong went with two male companions to see Lydia Thompson's new sensation. More than two months earlier, his wife had seen *The Black Crook*, probably with women friends, and

Strong, as a worldly connoisseur of music and the theatre, had no moral objections to the show. The style of acting was simply inane.

The Diary of George Templeton Strong, 4 vols., ed. Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 4:183.

I went through the weather to see *The White Fawn* at Niblo's—a grand new show piece, manifestly got up at very great cost, and said to surpass *The Black Crook* itself, which drew crowded houses for a year and a half. Ballet, spectacle, machinery, and pink legs are its chief constituents. The dialogue is senseless, the plot undiscoverable, and the music commonplace—plagiarism from the *Grande Duchesse* excepted. But the dresses, properties, decorations, and the like, are novel and lavish, except the costumes of the ballet girls, are the reverse of the lavish in quantity, though various and pretty in design and color. A grand procession of fishes, oysters and lobsters is very grotesque and carefully equipped. The final tableau or ''transformation scene'' is particularly elaborate and pretty. A scene shifter would call it gorgeous. In a meretricious sort of way it is quite artistic, with its slowly shifting masses of color, changing lights, and groups of good-looking young women (with very little on) nestling or hanging about everywhere. But the whole production depends for its success mainly on the well-formed lower extremities of female humanity. It is doubtless the most showy, and the least draped, specimen of what may be called the *Feminine-Femoral* School of Dramatic Art ever produced in New York. House packed—men mostly—and enthusiastic.

Curious ''progress'' has the drama made since the days of old Samuel Johnson, E. Burke, J. Reynolds, and Davy Garrick!

The British Blondes arrived at a time when traditional womanliness was attacked. With the lower classes frequenting German beer-halls and admiring skimpy costumes, and the new-wealthy fawning over French daring and English legs, the old moral standards seemed lost.

Many believed that the age of "shoddy"—wartime profiteering and corruption in business—had lowered the moral tone. The display of women's bodies as "Living Statues" clad in flesh-colored body-suits depicting "Venus Rising from the Sea" and other "classical" poses in Bowery concert saloons scandalized the New York press in the winter of 1847–48. In 1850, George Foster had reported in salacious detail, the tableaux "exhibitions" of the English Dr. Collyer with "lank-sided, flabby-breasted" "model artists" in baggy "fleshings."[9] The appearance in 1861 of the American Adah Issacs Menken in *Mazeppa*, strapped to a galloping horse and wearing the short tunic of a Tartar warrior (and little else), caused a sensation. When cheap concert saloons began to proliferate on the outer fringes of the Broadway theater district, the New York Sabbath Committee led the assault against "Continental" customs. In its pamphlet of 1866 on *Sunday Theatres,'Sacred Concerts,' and Beer Gar-*



Inexpensive cartes de visite, like this 1866 photograph of the young ballet dancer Betty Rigl in her "Demon Dance" costume from *The Black Crook*, popularized an enticingly scandalous image of the burlesque actress. Harvard Theatre Collection.

dens, the Sabbath Committee condemned "pretty waiter-girls" in short skirts who danced lasciviously and welcomed male customers with more than drink.

Mark Twain saw *The Black Crook* in February 1867. Now the scantily dressed were in the heart of the fashionable Broadway theater district, and managers were recruiting even "padded, painted, slab-sided, lantern-jawed old hags" to meet public demand.

Mark Twain's Travels with Mr. Brown, being heretofore uncollected sketches written by Mark Twain for the San Francisco Alta California in 1866 & 1867, describing the adventures of the author and his irrepressible companion in Nicaragua, Hannibal, New York, and other spots on their way to Europe, ed. Franklin Walker and G. Ezra Dane (New York: Knopf, 1940), 84–87 [originally published in the *San Francisco Alta California*, March 28, 1867].

When I was here in '53, a model artist show had an ephemeral existence in Chatham street, and then everybody growled about it, and the police broke it up. . . . But now, things are changed. The model artists play nightly to admiring multitudes at famous Niblo's Garden . . . [and] they call that sort of thing a "Grand Spectacular Drama," and everybody goes. It is all in a name. And it is about as spectacular as anything I ever saw without sinking right into the earth with outraged modesty. It is the wickedest show you can think of. You see there is small harm in exhibiting a pack of painted old harlots, swathed in gauze, like the original model artistes, for no man careth a cent for them but to laugh and jeer at them. Nakedness itself, in such a case, would be nothing worse than disgusting. But I warn you that when they put beautiful clipper-built girls on stage in this new fashion, with only just barely enough clothes on to be tantalizing, it is a shrewd invention of the devil. It lays a heavier siege to public morals than all the legitimate model artist shows you can bring into action.

The name of this new exhibition that so touches my missionary sensibilities is the "Black Crook." The scenic effects—the waterfalls, cascades, fountains, oceans, fairies, devils, hells, heavens, angels—are gorgeous beyond anything ever witnessed in America, perhaps, and these things attract the women and the girls. Then the endless ballets and splendid tableaux, with seventy beauties arrayed in dazzling half-costumes; and displaying all possible compromises between nakedness and decency, capture the men and boys—and so Niblo's has taken in twenty-four hundred dollars a night, (seven nights and a matinee a week,) for five months, and sometimes twenty-seven hundred dollars. It is claimed that a multitude equal to the entire population of the State of California, Chinamen included, have visited this play. The great *Herald* newspaper pitched into it, and a sensation parson preached a sermon against it; this was sufficient to advertise it all over the continent, and so the proprietor's fortune was made.

The scenery and the legs are everything; the actors who do the talking are the wretchedest sticks on the boards. But the fairy scenes—they fascinate the boys! Beautiful bare-legged girls hanging in flower-baskets; others stretched in groups on great sea shells; others clustered around fluted columns; others in all possible attitudes; girls—nothing but a wilderness of girls—stacked up, pile on pile, away aloft to the dome of the theatre, diminishing in size and clothing, till the last row, mere children, dangle high up from invisible ropes, arrayed only in a camisa [tunic]. The whole tableau resplendent with columns, scrolls, and a vast ornamental work, wrought in gold, silver and brilliant colors—all lit up with gorgeous theatrical fires, and witnessed

through a great gauzy curtain that counterfeits a soft silver mist! It is the wonders of the Arabian Nights realized.

Those girls in ballet, dressed with a meagreness that would make a parasol blush. And they prance around and expose themselves in a way that is scandalous to me. Moreover, they come trooping on the stage in platoons and battalions, in the most princely attire I grant you, but always with more tights in view than anything else. They change their clothes every fifteen minutes for four hours, and their dresses become more beautiful and rascally all the time. . . .

Edwin Booth and the legitimate drama still draw immense houses, but the signs of the times convince me that he will have to make a little change by-and-by and peel some women. Nothing else can chain the popular taste, the way things are going now.

As a keen amateur actor, a playwright, and a close friend of acting professionals, Charles Dickens enjoyed all kinds of popular entertainments, from the circus to music-hall acts in London's working-class East End. He was familiar with Adah Menken's *Mazeppa* in London. On his second trip to the United States, in 1867–68, the few leisure moments that he had between giving public readings from his works he spent in visits to the theater. Even so, Dickens found his unusually wide experience did not prepare him for the display of female flesh. In letters to friends in England, he reported on the latest American fashion.

The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. 11, *1865–1867*, ed. Graham Storey et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 511–12. *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 12, 1868–1870, ed. Graham Storey et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 81.

To John Forster New York, 15 December 1867

. . . Niblo's great attraction, the *Black Crook*, has now been played every night for 16 months (!), and is the most preposterous peg to hang ballets on that was ever seen. The people who act in it have not the slightest idea of what it is about, and never had; but; after taxing my intellectual powers to the utmost, I fancy that I have discovered Black Crook to be a malignant hunchback leagued with the Powers of Darkness to separate two lovers; and that the Powers of Lightness coming (in no skirts whatever) to the rescue, he is defeated. I am quite serious in saying that I do not suppose there are two pages of *All The Year Round* in the whole piece (which acts all night); the whole of the rest of it being ballets of all sorts, perfectly unaccountable processions, and the Donkey out of last year's Covent Garden pantomime! At the other theatres, comic operas, melodramas, and domestic dramas prevail all over the city, and my stories play no inconsiderable part in them.

To W. C. Macready Springfield, Mass. Saturday Twenty-First March

. . . To pass from Boston personal, to New York Theatrical, I will mention here that one of the Proprietors of my New York hotel is one of the Proprietors of Niblo's and the

most active. Consequently, I have seen *The Black Crook* and *The White Faun,* in majesty from an armchair in the first entrance P.S. [prompt side] more than once. Of these astonishing dramas, I beg to report (seriously) that I have found no human creature "behind," who has the slightest idea what they are about ('pon my honor, my Dearest Macready!) and that, having some amiable small talk with a neat little Spanish woman who is the premiere danseuse, I asked her, in joke, to let me measure her skirt with my dress glove. Holding the glove by the tip of the forefinger, I found the skirt to be just three gloves long—and its length was much in excess of the skirts of 200 other ladies whom the carpenters were, at that moment, getting into their places for a transformation scene—on revolving columns—on wire and travellers—on iron cradles —up in the flies—down in the cellars—on every impossible description of float that Wilmot gone distracted could imagine.

In *An Old-Fashioned Girl,* one of the series of novels that appeared soon after *Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott told of Polly Martin's shocked reaction to unfeminine women performing in the musical theater. Coming from the country, Polly felt like "a stranger in a strange land" in the city, and out of step with wealthy, teenage girls who thought only of the latest Grecian Bend dresses and reading sensational novels. Later, in *Work: A Story of Experience* (1873), Alcott showed Christie, cast as a song-and-dance Queen of the Amazons, disillusioned with the theater's "enchanted world": "Fairies, in rubber-boots and woollen head-gear, disported themselves on flowery barks of canvas, or were suspended aloft with hooks in their backs. . . Demons, guiltless of hoof or horn, clutched their victims with the inevitable 'Ha! ha!' and vanished darkly, eating pea-nuts."[10]

Alcott may have seen one of the latest sensation shows when she lived in Boston and was editing *Merry's Museum*—Thompson burlesques played at five of the seven Boston theaters in the winter season of 1868–69, when she began the novel. For two decades she had acted in private theatricals and had written a dozen thrillers under a pseudonym, so she had no objections to professional drama. But like "old-fashioned" Polly, Alcott found the "new world" of two dozen female jockeys flirting with the audience too immodest and too "French."

Louisa May Alcott, *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1870), 12–15.

[I]n came Fanny with the joyful news that Clara Bird had invited them both to go to the theatre with her that very evening, and would call for them at seven o'clock. Polly was so excited by this sudden plunge into the dissipations of city life, that she flew about like a distracted butterfly, and hardly knew what happened, till she found herself seated before the great green curtain in the brilliant theatre. Old Mr. Bird sat on one side, Fanny on the other, and both let her alone, for which she was very grateful, as her whole attention was so absorbed in the scene around her, that she couldn't talk.

Polly had never been much to the theatre, and the few plays she had seen were the good old fairy tales, dramatized to suit young beholders, lively, bright, and full of the harmless nonsense which brings the laugh without the blush. That night she saw one of the new spectacles which have lately become the rage, and run for hundreds of nights, dazzling, exciting, and demoralizing the spectator by every allurement French ingenuity can invent, and American prodigality execute. Never mind what its name was, it was very gorgeous, very vulgar, and very fashionable; so, of course, it was much admired, and every one went to see it. At first Polly thought she had got into fairy-land, and saw only the sparkling creatures who danced and sung in a world of light and beauty; but presently she began to listen to the songs and conversation, and then the illusion vanished; for the lovely phantoms sang negro melodies, talked slang, and were a disgrace to the good old-fashioned elves whom she knew and loved so well.

Our little girl was too innocent to understand half the jokes, and often wondered what people were laughing at; but as the first enchantment subsided, Polly began to feel uncomfortable, to be sure her mother wouldn't like to have her there, and to wish she hadn't come. Somehow, things seemed to get worse and worse as the play went on; for one small spectator was being rapidly enlightened by the gossip going on all about her, as well as by her own quick eyes and girlish instincts. When four-and-twenty girls, dressed as jockeys, came prancing onto the stage, cracking their whips, stamping the heels of their top-boots, and winking at the audience, Polly did not think it at all funny, but looked disgusted, and was glad when they were gone; but when another set appeared in a costume consisting of gauze wings, and a bit of gold fringe around the waist, poor unfashionable Polly didn't know what to do; for she felt both frightened and indignant, and sat with her eyes on her play-bill, and her cheeks getting hotter and hotter every minute.

"What are you blushing so for?" asked Fanny as the painted sylphs vanished.

"I'm so ashamed of those girls," whispered Polly, taking a long breath of relief.

"You little goose, it's just the way it was done in Paris, and the dancing is splendid. It seems queer at first, but you'll get used to it, as I did."

"I'll never come again," said Polly, decidedly; for her innocent nature rebelled against the spectacle, which, as yet, gave her more pain than pleasure. She did not know how easy it was to "get used to it," as Fanny did; and it was well for her that the temptation was not often offered. She could not explain the feeling, but she was glad when the play was done and they were safe at home, where kind Grandma was waiting to see them comfortably into bed.

"Did you have a good time, dear?" she asked, looking at Polly's feverish cheeks and excited eyes.

"I don't wish to be rude, but I didn't," answered Polly. "Some of it was splendid; but a good deal of it made me want to go under the seat. People seemed to like it, but *I* don't think it was proper."

As Polly freed her mind, and emphasized her opinion with a decided rap of the boot she had just taken off, Fanny laughed, and said, while she pirouetted about the

room like Mademoiselle Therese, ''Polly was shocked, Grandma. Her eyes were as big as saucers, her face as red as my sash, and once I thought she was going to cry. Some of it *was* rather queer; but of course it was proper or all our set wouldn't go. I heard Mrs. Smythe Perkins say, 'It was charming, so like dear Paris;' and she has lived abroad, so of course she knows what is what.''

''I don't care if she has. I know it *wasn't* proper for little girls to see, or I shouldn't have been so ashamed!'' cried sturdy Polly, perplexed, but not convinced, even by Mrs. Smythe Perkins.

''I think you are right, my dear; but you have lived in the country, and haven't yet learned that modesty has gone out of fashion.'' And with a good-night kiss, Grandma left Polly to dream dreadfully of dancing in jockey costume on a great stage, while Tom played a big drum in the orchestra, and the audience all wore the faces of her father and mother, looking sorrowfully at her, with eyes like saucers, and faces as red as Fanny's sash.

Olive Logan was the most vocal critic of the "Leg Business." Logan came from a well-known theatrical family, had been successful as both playwright and actress, but had retired from the stage in 1867. In May 1869, in a speech to the Equal Rights Association convention, she criticized the theater for its discrimination against women, and in a letter to the *New York Times* the same month, specified the unseemly physical requirements that managers made of "actresses." *The Black Crook* had at least some genuine ballerinas, but the "English burlesque blondes" merely exhibited their "nude" bodies. Logan defined nude by Samuel Johnson's definition, as "ill-supplied with garments." Her complaint was on economic as well as moral grounds: the unadorned display of women's bodies was not only degrading but restricted their freedom in the marketplace. Unfortunately, when the pressing issues of the Reconstruction suffrage amendments were being discussed, Logan's speech had little support from feminists.

Olive Logan, *Apropos of Women and Theatres. With a Paper or Two on Parisian Topics* (New York: Carleton, 1869), 128–30, 132–36, 137,142–43, 145–46, 152–53.

How, then, does it happen that in attacking these yellow-haired nudities, I am compelled to say that they disgrace the dramatic profession?

In this wise: These creatures occupy the temples of the drama; they perform in conjunction with actors and actresses, on the same stage, before the same audience, in the same hour. They are made legitimate members of our theatrical companies, and take part in those nondescript performances which are called burlesques, spectacles, what you will. They carry off the chief honors of the hour; their names occupy the chief places on the bills; and . . . they win the chief prizes in the theatrical world.

A woman who has not ability enough to rank as a passable ''walking lady'' in a good theatre, on a salary of twenty-five dollars a week, can strip herself almost naked,

and be thus qualified to go upon the stage of two-thirds of our theatres at a salary of one hundred dollars and upwards.

Clothed in the dress of an honest woman, she is worth nothing to a manager. Stripped as naked as she dare—and it seems there is little left when so much is done—she becomes a prize to her manager, who knows that crowds will rush to see her, and pays her a salary accordingly. . . .

There are certain accomplishments which render the Nude Woman "more valuable to managers in the degree that she possesses them." I will tell you what these accomplishments are, and you shall judge how far they go toward making her, in any sense, an actress.

They are: 1. The ability to sing. 2. The ability to jig. 3. The ability to play on certain musical instruments. . . .

You, no doubt, will at once remark that these accomplishments have hitherto been peculiar to that branch of the show business occupied by the negro minstrel. But in the hands of the negro minstrel, these accomplishments amuse us without disgusting us. They are not wedded to bare legs, nor suggestive feminine leers and winks; nor is there a respectable minstrel band in the United States to-day which would tolerate in its members the *double entendres* which fly about the stages of some of the largest temples of the drama in this city. The minstrels would not dare utter them. Their halls would be vacated, and their business ruined. It requires that a half-naked woman should utter these ribaldous inuendoes, before our fastidious public will receive them unrebukingly.

To what branch of the show business, then, do these creatures belong?

I answer, to that branch which is known by the names of variety-show, concert-saloon, music-hall, and various other titles, which mean nothing to you unless you already know they mean.

No one in the show business needs to be told what a variety-show is. It is certainly not a theatre.

Until the reign of the nude woman set in, variety-halls were the resort of only the lowest and vilest, and women were not seen in the audience.

The nude woman was sometimes seen upon the stage, but she was only one of a large variety of attractions,—she was a tid-bit, hugely relished by the low and vile who went to see her; but only permitted to exhibit herself economically, for fear of cloying the public appetite.

Delicate caution! but how useless, her later career in our theatres has shown.

There, she is exhibited ceaselessly for three hours, in every variety which an indecent imagination can devise.

When the *Black Crook* first presented its nude woman to the gaze of a crowded auditory, she was met with a gasp of astonishment at the effrontery which dared show so much. Men actually grew pale at the boldness of the thing; a death-like silence fell over the house, broken only by a band of *claqueurs* around the outer aisles;

but it passed; and, in view of the fact that these women were French ballet-dancers after all, they were tolerated.

By slow and almost imperceptible degrees, this shame has grown, until to-day the indecency of that exhibition is far surpassed. Those women were ballet-dancers from France and Italy, and they represented in their nudity imps and demons. In silence they whirled about the stage; in silence trooped off. Some faint odor of ideality and poetry rested over them.

The nude woman of to-day represents nothing but herself. She runs upon the stage giggling; trots down to the foot-lights, winks at the audience, rattles off from her tongue some stupid attempts at wit, some twaddling allusions to Sorosis, or General Grant, or other subject prominent in the public eye, and is always and peculiarly herself,—the woman, that is, whose name is on the bills in large letters, and who considers herself an object of admiration to the spectators.

The sort of ballet-dancer who figured in the *Black Crook* is paralleled on the stage of every theatre in this city, except one, at this time.

She no longer excites attention.

To create a proper and profitable sensation in the breast of man, she no longer suffices. Something bolder must be devised,—something that shall utterly eclipse and outstrip her.

Hence, the nude woman of to-day,—who outstrips her in the broadest sense. And, as if it were not enough that she should be allowed to go unhissed and unrotten-egged, she must be baptized with the honors of a profession for which Shakespeare wrote!

Managers recognize her as an actress, and pay her sums ranging from fifty to a thousand dollars a week, according to her value in their eyes. Actresses, who love virtue better than money, are driven into the streets by her; and it becomes a grave and solemn question with hundreds of honorable women what they shall do to earn a livelihood.

I say that it is nothing less than an insult to the members of the dramatic profession, that these nude women should be classed among actresses and hold possession of the majority of our theatres. Their place is in the concert-saloons or the circus tents. Theatres are for artists. . . .

Women in society conceal all the lower part of their bodies with drapery,—and for good and sufficient reasons, which, no man, who has a wife or mother, should stop to question. . . .

I take up next an anonymous letter, dated at Boston, and signed, ''A Sister Member of the Profession.''

The writer says she is a respectable actress, and professes to be ignorant that gross evils prevail in the theatrical world.

She refers to my letter in the New York *Times*, and asks at what theatre such questions were ever put to an applicant for employment.

In my letter to the *Times*, I said,—

"I referred the other night to decent young women who are not celebrities,—merely honest, modest girls, whose parents have left them the not very desirable heritage of the stage, and who find it difficult to obtain any other employment, being uneducated for any other. When these girls go into a theatre to apply for a situation now, they find that the requirements of managers are expressed in the following questions,—

"1. Is your hair dyed yellow?

"2. Are your legs, arms, and bosom symmetrically formed, and are you willing to expose them?

"3. Can you sing brassy songs, and dance the can-can, and wink at men, and give utterance to disgusting half-words, which mean whole actions?

"4. Are you acquainted with any rich men who will throw you flowers, and send you presents, and keep afloat dubious rumors concerning your chastity?

"5. Are you willing to appear to-night and every night, amid the glare of gas-lights, and before the gaze of thousands of men, in this pair of satin breeches, ten inches long, without a vestige of drapery upon your person?

"If you can answer these questions affirmatively, we will give you a situation; if not, there's the door." . . .

It is not necessary, I suppose, to give with the accuracy of a criminal trial report the exact questions which pass between managers and actresses, who seek for employment. Their purport is unmistakable. . . .

I respect the theatre in its purity. I respect the actor who is an artist,—even the harmless clown of the pantomime, who makes us laugh without offending decency. That I love so many good and lovely women who are actresses, is my chief reason for deploring the reign of a class of women who are neither good nor lovely,—but coarse, indecent, painted, padded, and dyed.

If it were possible to treat the Nude Woman Question, and leave the nude woman herself out of it, I should be glad to do so. I am the last to wish to give pain to any person; but, in the path of clear duty, there is no choice. When it becomes a question between suffering, struggling virtue, and vice which rolls in luxury, and gathers unto itself wealth by the sheer practice of its wickedness, no woman who loves honor in her sex can hesitate as to the course to be taken. . . .

I see no other way to effect a cure of this nude woman evil but to make it odious. To that end, I shall do what in me lies. This article is but a beginning. I shall not cease to combat the encroachments of the nude woman upon the domain which should be occupied by true artists, and by virtuous men and women.

Firm in the belief that this indecent army *can* be routed, I call on all honorable souls, both in and out of the profession, to stand by my side and strike hard blows. We shall get hard blows in return, no doubt; but poor indeed must be the panoply of that warrior who can not hold his own against the cohorts of the nude woman. Whatever

falls on my head in consequence of my words, I promise to give thrust for thrust. I do not fear the issue.

"Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel JUST."

The British Blondes were not well liked by newspaper critics, apart from the *Clipper*. They were seen to be defying convention openly and outrageously. Their use of artifice, especially dyed hair, and notoriously, padding to display a more rounded profile of legs, hips and bust, was questioned at a time when the respectable still frowned on cosmetics. They also did not behave in a demure and ladylike manner. At a time when men played "nigger wenches" on stage, the Blondes performed minstrel clog dances and played trumpet and banjo. They jiggled and wiggled. They were loud, brash, and brazen. The most disturbing aspect was the cross-dressing that challenged notions of gender. Lydia Thompson favored classical or exotic dress, but her version of a man's Roman toga or Oriental robe revealed her bare legs and the corset exaggerated her female curves. Her "male" body language—smoking, staring boldly, and crossing her legs—rebuked modest femininity and notions of vulnerability.

William Dean Howells, beginning his career as a novelist and playwright and as drama critic for the prestigious *Atlantic Monthly*, was shocked by the "physical unreserve" of the new English burlesque actresses that he saw in Boston. Thompson, he wrote, "had a raucous voice, an insolent twist of the mouth, and a terrible trick of defying her enemies by standing erect, chin up, hand on hip, and right foot advanced, patting the floor."

William Dean Howells, "The New Taste in Theatricals," *Atlantic Monthly* 16 (May 1869): 640–44.

As for the burlesques themselves, they were nothing, the performers personally everything. . . . [T]here was commonly a flimsy ravelling of parodied myth, that held together the different dances and songs, though sometimes it was a novel or an opera burlesqued; but there was always a song and always a dance for each lady, song and dance being equally slangy, and depending for their effect mainly, upon the natural or simulated charms of the performer.

It was also an indispensable condition of the burlesque's success, that the characters should be reversed in their representation,—that the men's *rôles* should be played by women, and that at least one female part should be done by a man. It must be owned that the fun all came from this character, the ladies being too much occupied with the more serious business of bewitching us with their pretty figures to be very amusing; whereas this wholesome man and brother, with his blond wig, his *panier* [basket], his dainty feminine simperings and languishings, his falsetto tones, and his general air of extreme fashion, was always exceedingly droll. He was the saving grace of these stupid plays. . . . But otherwise, the burlesques were as little

cheerful as profitable. The playwrights who had adapted them to the American stage —for they are all of English authorship—had been good enough to throw in some political allusions which were supposed to be effective with us, but which it was sad to see received with apathy. . . .

The burlesque chiefly betrayed its descent from the spectacular ballet in its undressing; but that ballet, while it demanded personal exposure, had something very observable in its scenic splendors, and all that marching and processioning in it was rather pretty; while in the burlesque there seemed nothing of innocent intent. No matter what the plot, it led always to a final great scene of breakdown,—which was doubtless most impressive in that particular burlesque where this scene represented the infernal world, and the ladies gave the dances of the country with a happy conception of the deportment of lost souls. There, after some vague and inconsequent dialogue, the wit springing from a perennial source of humor (not to specify the violation of the seventh commandment), the dancing commenced, each performer beginning with the Walk-round of the negro minstrels, rendering its grotesqueness with a wonderful frankness of movement, and then plunging into the mysteries of her dance with a kind of infuriate grace and a fierce delight very curious to look upon. It was perfect of its kind, that dancing, but some things one witnesses at the theatre nowadays had better be treated as a kind of confidence. . . . I dare not say how sketchily these ladies were dressed, or indeed, more than that they were dressed to resemble circus-riders of the other sex, but as to their own deceived nobody,—possibly did not intend deceit. . . .

Yet it was to be noted with regret that our innocence, our respectability, had no restraining influence upon the performance; and the fatuity of the hope cherished by some courageous people, that the presence of virtuous persons would reform the stage, was but too painfully evident. The doubt whether they were not nearer right who have denounced the theatre as essentially and incorrigibly bad would force itself upon the mind, though there was a little comfort in the thought that if virtue had been actually allowed to frown upon these burlesques, the burlesques might have been abashed into propriety. . . .

Commonly, however, the members of these burlesque troupes, though they were not like men, were in most things as unlike women, and seemed creatures of a kind of alien sex, parodying both. It was certainly a shocking thing to look at them with their horrible prettiness, their archness in which was no charm, their grace which put to shame. . . .

The new taste, as has been said before, is not our taste. It came to us like any other mode from abroad, but, unlike the fashions in dress, received no modification or impression from our life; so that, though curiosity led thousands, not in Boston alone, but in all our great cities, to look at these lewd travesties, it could not be said that we naturalized among us a form of entertainment involving fable that we could not generally understand, satire that we cared nothing about, lascivious dancing, singing that expressed only a depraved cockneyism. . . .

But after we have praised these modern plays to their full desert, we must again recur to their foreign character. They have no relation to our life as a people; we can only appreciate them through our knowledge of English life derived from novel reading. Their interest all depends upon the conditions of English society; their characters are English; their scenes are English. . . .

It is very probable that we shall not see the burlesques again next winter, and that what has been here called the new taste in theatricals will then be an old-fashioned folly, generally ignored because it is old-fashioned, if not because it is folly. This belief is grounded, not so much upon faith in the power of the stage to reform itself, or the existence of a principle in the theatre-going public calculated to rebuke the stage's wantonness, as upon the fact that matters have already reached a point beyond which they cannot go. In the direction of burlesque, no novelty now remains which is not forbidden by statute.

Of all the theater critics, Richard Grant White was the most charitable to the "burlesque" actresses (and reputed to have had an affair with the Blondes star, Pauline Markham). In a telling allusion, he compared the cross-dressed women with a "set of chess-men which a mischievous boy had taken apart and screwed together with the black pieces on the white standards, and the white on the black, the bodies and heads of the pieces being misplaced in a like manner." Their dancing might be "vulgar and gross," but their articulation of language was excellent. If the extravaganzas were trivial, the spirit of the age that rejected expressions of emotion was to blame.

Richard Grant White, "The Age of Burlesque," *Galaxy* 8 (August 1869): 256–60, 266.

It means something, this outbreak of burlesque acting all over the world. No mere accident has made so monstrous a kind of entertainment equally acceptable to three publics so different as those of Paris, London, and New York. And by monstrous I do not mean wicked, disgusting, or hateful, but monstrously incongruous and unnatural. The peculiar trait of burlesque is its defiance both of the natural and the conventional. Rather, it forces the conventional and the natural together just at the points where they are most remote, and the result is absurdity, monstrosity. Its system is a defiance of system. It is out of *all* keeping. Its ideal figure, if it has an ideal, might be Julius Caesar in top boots and spectacles, carrying a baggy green cotton umbrella. Now the great dictator might have been the better for the services of all these articles. His moral majesty did not lift him above the every-day needs of men; but in our idea he is at least removed from them. The anachronism would not be all of the absurdity. We cannot think of him as blowing his nose on a red bandanna handkerchief more than we could so think of Jupiter. But burlesque casts down all the gods from their pedestals. . . . This trait of burlesque reached its fullest development in the mingling of the ancient and the modern, the heroic and the common-place, in ''La Belle Helène,'' and in ''The Forty Thieves,'' in which the forty robbers were represented by forty young

women, who, as a part of their daily drill, at the command of their captain, pulled out forty matches and lit forty cigarettes; in which a donkey danced a break-down, and Morgiana, pouring the poison into the jars in which the forty were concealed, exclaimed, "They do die beautiful."

Now, in such performances as this, there is plainly no dramatic interest. They have not even the coherence of farce, which is a dramatic caricature of nature. But a caricature must have a certain conformity to nature, or it cannot be caricature, which exaggerates or over-charges the characteristics of nature, whence it receives its name. In burlesque there is caricature; but it is without the relations of parts to a whole, without design, without coherence. It would seem as if a composition or performance of which these remarks are true could not be recognized in any sense as a work of art, as if in such work there could never be any scope for genius. . . . The motive of burlesque is always satire. If this did not pervade it there would not be life enough in it to keep it sweet and make it hold together. The pleasure, the instruction, and the comfort that we all derive from seeing the vices and the follies of others held up to ridicule are so great that we do not scrutinize too closely the manner in which they are conveyed. And in these days ridicule is, more than ever before, the sieve through which all men and things are sifted. There is a great deal of earnest thinking done; but even earnestness must not be too obtrusive, if it would escape ridicule, caricature, burlesque. Caricature has become a social and political power in all civilized communities. There is a disposition to criticise and to derogate from all high pretensions, not only pretensions to place, and power, and social distinction, but to virtue, to knowledge, to sentiment, and even to genuine feeling. At such pretensions we are inclined to scoff. . . .

Men used even to profess sentiment, and it was thought a fine thing to give way to emotion. Now we repress, as much as we are able, all such manifestations in ourselves, and we look with dislike, and even with suspicion, on them in others. We seem not to be equal to a grand scene; our nervous system will not bear the strain; we cower under a tempest of feeling; and seek refuge in scorn and ridicule. When we are threatened with a flood of feeling we take the tone and the language of the antediluvian, and declare that there is not going to be much of a shower. . . .

But the tragic, the emotional, even the tender, we can hardly bear to look upon. Our grandmothers vaunted their sensibility, and even our grandfathers prided themselves on their sentiment. But the very words sensibility and sentiment convey to us some sense of the ridiculous. . . .

This being the temper of the time, we cannot endure tragedy, or even the ideal presentation of life in high comedy, when tragedy and comedy assume a concrete form on the stage. . . . I do not believe that our repression of the manifestation of feeling has really deadened our sensibilities; for at no period of the world's history was there more active sympathy with real suffering, or so candid an appreciation of the claims of individual prejudice to consideration, or of the genuineness of a sentimental grievance. . . .

Observation of men around us seems to support us in our assumption that sensitiveness of soul is in inverse proportion to manifestation of feeling. Certainly it is so in the relations of men to dramatic art. The same acting of grand tragedy or of sentimental comedy, which, in the last generation, would have pleased what was called genteel society, is now acceptable only to the coarsest and most sluggish natures—those who are immovable except by hard blows oft repeated. . . .

Of such a condition of the public mind in regard to the drama and dramatic part of life, burlesque is the legitimate and inevitable outcome. Join to this the craving for the enjoyment of material splendor and sensuous beauty, and the result is ''The Black Crook,'' ''La Grande Duchesse de Gerolstein,'' ''La Belle Helène,'' ''The Forty Thieves,'' and ''Sinbad the Sailor.''

The next step to the repression of manifestations of real feeling, is the caricature of such manifestations in art. And then, as mere caricature in acting is insufficient in its interest, the element of beauty is added, and in a monstrous form—that of women playing men's parts, and dressed for incongruity's sake, as well as for a display of their beauty, in the costumes of men centuries ago; while many of the personages are in the dress of the present day, and in some cases both costumes are mingled. Extravagance in all these respects could not go farther than it has gone in some of the burlesques recently produced in Europe and in this country. . . .

But going there [to Niblo's for *The Forty Thieves*] at a morning's performance, in search of a needed laugh, which I confess I do not get, I was surprised, not only with the merit of the lady herself, and of some of her companions, but with the character of the audience. The latter I expected to find made up of coarse and flashy people; but on the contrary, it was notable in the main, for simple and almost homely respectability. Comfortable, middle-aged women from the suburbs, and from the remoter country, their daughters, groups of children, a few professional men, bearing their quality in their faces, some sober, farmer-looking folk, a clergyman or two, apparently, the usual proportion of nondescripts, among whom were not very many young men, composed an audience less respectable than I had seen in Fourteenth street, but at least respectable. And the Lydia Thompson, in whom I had expected to find a coarse, Anglo-Saxon exaggeration of Mlle. Tostée, I found one of the most charming comic actresses it has been my good fortune to see. She played burlesque with a daintiness with which few actresses of note are able to flavor their acting, even in high comedy. She was doing hard work, no doubt, but her heart must have been in it, for she was the enbodiment of mirth, and moved others to hilarity by being moved herself. It was as if Venus, in her quality of the goddess of laughter, had come upon the stage. And if there was a likeness to Venus in the costume, as well as in manner, I must confess that I saw in it no chance of harm to myself or to any of my fellow spectators, old or young, male or female. Indeed, it seems rather to be desired that the points of a fine woman should be better known, and more thought of among us than they have been. They seem to me quite as important, and I think they are quite as interesting as those of a fine horse; and I should be sorry to believe that they are more harmful, either to taste or to morals.

Some of the outcry that we hear against the costume of which the burlesque actresses wear, in the way of their profession, has in it such a tone of personal injury, that it might come from mammas and papas who, having a very poor article of young woman lying heavy on their hands, are indignant that there should be so good and so easy an opportunity of trying it by a very high standard. As to any impropriety in this costume, in its place, that is, seriously speaking, a matter of individual opinion; but if there is any, it is far less, both in degree and in kind, than that of the ordinary ballet dancer, with her flying petticoat, alternately concealing and revealing the attractions of her figure, which we have looked at ever since we were children, even in this dear old Niblo's Garden, without a thought of shamefacedness, and very much less than that of the tilting hoops, which lent such peculiar attractions to the "German" in fashionable society only two years ago. . . .

The drama, as an intellectual diversion of the mind from one channel of thought into another, has passed away, I think, forever. The public, even the cultivated public, in all countries, prefers that kind of theatrical entertainment at which it is not required to think. It asks, not diversion, a *turning* of the mind from one object to another, but the pleasure of the senses while the mind lies dormant. It seeks only to be amused. Of this mood, burlesque or "spectacular extravaganza" is the natural and inevitable product. We, of Anglo-Saxon race at least, have probably seen the last of our legitimate drama.

The Popular-Price Circuit

By the turn of the century the cheap variety halls had abandoned any pretence at satire. In a Brooklyn theater the journalist Arthur Ruhl found a "roughhouse" musical comedy, a poor man's Harrigan and Hart, knock-about ethnic caricature which featured the "Beef Trust Beauties," everyone weighing about two hundred pounds. It was traditional: the Beauties' boxing ballad, "Throw Him Down McClusky," had been made famous by Maggie Cline, the Irish star, in the 1880s. The old-fashioned shows in Brooklyn or the Bowery were quite unlike the genuinely creative travesties of Weber and Fields on Broadway, but, by holding amateur talent contests, had retained a direct personal link between the regular stock company and the public, a link which had been lost in the "cold business houses up-town."

Arthur Ruhl, *Second Nights: People and Ideas of the Theatre To-Day* (New York: Scribner's, 1914).

It was a sign on a Ninth Avenue ash can,

BILLY WATSON AND HIS BEEF TRUST BEAUTIES

which lured me to the outskirts of farthest Brooklyn for a somewhat closer study of burlesque. It was one of those raining winter days when the sponge-like sky, not content to squeeze itself over the town, seems to sag into the very streets and the

world is so muffled and opaque that one is almost surprised to find its ordinary wheels still turning.

Under the river and out again, through interminable streets, alike in dismalness and dismal still under the cold winter rain, and then, when it seemed as if one must have taken the wrong car, there was a big, warm, crowded theatre, full of band music and smoke and the smell of chocolate and spearmint, and men and women and children roaring at *Krausmeyer's Alley*.

Where they came from, how they could leave their homes or work—they and the thousands like them crowding similar houses in Eighth Avenue, the Bronx, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, goodness knows where, every afternoon in the week—that is one of the mysteries. Here they were, at any rate, there on the stage was Mr. Billy Watson—baggy comedian's clothes, toothpick in his mouth, red nose, cuffs tied in ribbons, hatchet in his pocket—a sort of mixed-up Cyrano striding, impudent and serene, through this slapstick epic of the ''Irish an' the Dutch.''

Mr. Watson, as one might gather from the name bestowed on his assistants—its enchanting connotation flashed across his mind at the time of the beef-trust investigation and he has used it ever since—belongs to the classic or Boeotian school of burlesque, uncontaminated, or nearly so, by the soft Ionian refinements of musical comedy. *Krausmeyer's Alley* goes back to the days when there were shanties and goats in New York where apartment-houses stand now. Krausmeyer's shanty and Grogan's are perched on adjoining rocks with a clothes-line between, or, in more spirited moments, a shower of cats. You will have seen this shower of cats on some back-street billboard, perhaps, and thought it but a fanciful decoration, a flower of the same order of lithography as that from which has sprung the comic valentine, but Krausmeyer and Grogan actually throw them in the play and have been throwing them these eighteen or twenty years.

The action throughout is set in this simple Elizabethan key. The slapstick has gone out even among such classicists as Mr. Watson, but a hatchet takes its place, and he would be lost without it as a Drury Lane villain without his gold cigarette case. How roguish its appearance as he asks, ''Has anyone here seen Grogan?'' and as he embraces the leading lady, how wittily—unseen by her—he taps her on the back with it, while the bass drum goes ''*Pom!*'' or the orchestra makes a sound like rapping a hollow cocoanut.

When Krausmeyer enters Grogan thinks he ''smells a muskrat,'' and Grogan, planting his feet on the table, is requested to take them off and ''give the limburger a chance.'' We are scarcely introduced to the alley before there is a general fight. And the first act ends—after the Beef Trust Beauties, appropriately dressed in red silk tights, red claw-hammer coats, and red top-hats to represent ''Fifth Avenue swells,'' have danced and sung—in a ''fight, battle scene, riot.''

We go to Ireland in the next act, where a medley of Irish songs are sung by the company's handsome soloist and the Beef Trust Beauties appear as the ''French girls invited from the Parisienne,'' and then Grogan and Krausmeyer fight again. Then the

scene shifts to New York and the christening of little Philip Krausmeyer, with the Beef Trust Beauties metamorphosed into "grown-up kids from the alley." There is vivid repartee about little Philip's resemblance to Grogan, ending with what the programme describes as a "fight to the finish," and down goes the curtain on "Auld Lang Syne." Spirited, slap-bang stuff, it will be observed, fit for a generation which sang "Throw him down, McClusky!" from the heart and knew naught of tea dances or cabarets. . . .

Shows like *Krausmeyer's Alley* will doubtless soon be no more. Pale wraiths of musical comedy are continually crossing the once scornful frontiers and moving pictures flicker where once the slap-stick rang. The Bowery is not what it once used to be when it was full of shooting-galleries and sailors and strong-arm men and poor girls drank carbolic on the dance-floor at McGuirk's; nor is burlesque what it was when on a summer's evening, you could hear the chorus at Tony Pastor's through the open windows at Tammany Hall; when Annie Yeamans was singing "Maggie Murphy's Home," and Lillian Russell was a girl.

THE WILD WEST SHOW

Unlike other great powers in the nineteenth century, the United States had "free land" to acquire immediately adjacent to its settled border. England and France annexed huge areas overseas in Africa and Asia; America found its "empire" beyond the Atlantic's hinterland, and moved rapidly to the Mississippi, the Rocky Mountains, and the Pacific. Europeans brought home "tribesmen," "natives," and "jungle" animals as imperial trophies and exhibits for fairground sideshows; Americans had their "Indians," "cowboys," and captive buffalo. In the 1830s and 1840s, in New York, London, and Paris, George Catlin staged dances of a few "wild" midwestern Indians against a backdrop of their authentic artefacts and his paintings of their camps and customs. Dime showmen often included western "warriors" among their human oddities, but only in the 1880s did a fully fledged "Wild West" show emerge. Its personnel were billed as distinctively American, demonstrating New World skills of horsemanship with the guns of conquest. Where Catlin used drama to enliven his lectures and art, the new wild west shows relegated education to the program, not the platform. What interested audiences in the West performed was not homesteads and harvests, grain silos and gold mines, plows and Pullmans, but Fenimore Cooper's woodsmen modernized as American knights of the plains. No one was more instrumental in promoting this American historical drama than Buffalo Bill.

William Frederick Cody transformed history into myth. His real-life exploits in the 1860s and 1870s were the stuff of frontier romance. He was a Pony Express rider, a buffalo hunter for the Kansas Pacific railroad construction gangs, and a scout with the Fifth Cavalry in the Indian campaigns on the Great Plains. In November 1869 Ned Buntline published *Buffalo Bill, the King of the Border Men* in the *New York Weekly*. It became a Bowery Theatre play two years later, but was regarded as lighthearted fantasy; within a month it was burlesqued in Hooley's Opera House in Brooklyn as *Bill Buffalo, with His Great Buffalo Bull*. The larger-than-life adventures of "Buffalo Bill" Cody were promoted by the *Weekly* serial's editors as "The Greatest Romance of the Age." Dozens of dime novels followed. National fame launched Cody's second career as an entertainer and impresario of frontier skills. Gradually he

learned the arts of showmanship. In 1872, with official permission from the U.S. Army, he organized a hunting expedition for the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia, in which he included a demonstration of a hundred Brulé Sioux, led by Spotted Tail, using bow and arrow to kill buffalo. In the fall and winter of 1872 he toured eastern theaters as a performance artist, and in 1873 he formed his own company, the Buffalo Bill Combination. For ten years Cody and other authentic westerners, dressed in elaborately fringed buckskin outfits, and occasionally genuine Indians, played themselves in action-melodramas contrived by Buntline. These were pure sensation-spectacles, dime novels animated, with little dialogue of consequence. *The Scouts of the Prairie; or Red Deviltry As It Is* was typical. The nonsensical plot involved fights with outlaws, horses on stage, shooting, a prairie fire, and a Scalp Dance; the love-interest was the exotic Dove Eye, a former ballerina from *The Black Crook*, described not unkindly by the Chicago *Tribune* critic as "a beautiful Indian maiden with an Italian accent and a weakness for scouts."[1]

Soon, life and art became indistinguishable. In 1876, while serving as an army scout, Cody killed the Cheyenne warrior, Yellow Hand. The gaudy vaquero costume of black velvet with silver buttons and lace trim which he had worn during that Nebraska campaign became a genuine prop for his theatrical performances. Within a few months, he was using it, and Yellow Hand's hair as trophy, in *The Red Right Hand: or, Buffalo Bill's First Scalp for Custer.* Cody moved on to grander performances. On July 4, 1882, he arranged the "Old Glory Blow-Out," an Independence Day celebration in his home town of North Platte, Nebraska. It incorporated the staples of his entertainment package for the next decade—genuine Indians, a buffalo chase, and "cow-boy" skills of roping, riding, and shooting. In May 1883 Cody joined Dr. William Frank Carver in Omaha in the Wild West, Rocky Mountain and Prairie Exhibition. The partnership foundered after a few months, and Cody teamed up with actor-manager Nate Salsbury to form Buffalo Bill's Wild West—America's National Entertainment. Tours of the East in 1885 and 1886, of England in 1887 and 1892, and France, Italy, and Germany in 1889–92 established the Wild West's reputation.

As the "Knight of the Plains," the "Last of the Plainsmen," or the "Last of the Great Scouts," Cody was a nostalgic symbol for the "disappearing" west of the buffalo, pioneer, hunter, and cattle trails in the new age of the railroad, the settler, and the mining company. Buffalo Bill's Wild West ignored the current western issues of exploiting the land, farmers' protests, railroad regulation, and free silver, and dwelt on dime-novel heroic dashes and clashes. Staged frontier melodramas had already shaded distinctions between hunting, scouting, and Indian fighting on the plains and ranching in the southwest. Prentiss Ingraham had scripted one of Cody's plays in 1879, and in February 1887 produced the first fictional cowboy hero in his Beadle half-dime novel, *Buck*

Taylor, King of the Cowboys; or, The Raiders and the Rangers, A Story of the Wild and Thrilling Life of William L. Taylor. The constellation of white western warriors was now complete.

Throughout the 1880s and early 1890s, Buffalo Bill's Wild West program remained substantially the same. Displays of horsemanship were key. The European hippodrama was recast with an explicitly American and western theme of "cow-boy fun" in roping and breaking-in mustangs and chasing Indians. Guns were the weapons of conquest. Shooting at all kinds of targets—glass balls, coins, cards—from every possible position (including a poodle's head) made up a quarter of the program. Markswomen like Annie Oakley demonstrated expertise with the rifle, but glamorous "Western girls" in ladylike divided skirts and buckskin fringes also rode and shot. Indians inside and outside the arena fascinated visitors. In his first large-scale "exhibition" in Nebraska in 1883, Cody advertised the Indian Camp as "a Living, Picturesque Reproduction of Savage Life." Easterners were even more curious: family groups at home, surrounded by "tribal" artefacts and adorned with animal skins and face paint, were always popular attractions and photographic souvenirs. Melodramatic action against the painted canvas backdrop in the large open-air arena was supposed to link the diverse western scenes of racing and chasing. But after a few years of experimentation, Cody and Salsbury became aware that hunting buffalo, trick-shooting, and rescuing white maidens from villains lacked thematic unity. In 1886 they enlisted the talents of the theater director Steele MacKaye, and for the winter season at New York's Madison Square Garden, MacKaye reorganized the program to illustrate "epochs" in the evolving "Drama of Civilization" of America's founding. MacKaye's vivid special effects of prairie fire and cyclonic winds proved too elaborate and impractical for itinerant performances across the nation, where tent shows lacked the necessary machinery, but his narrative gave the Wild West more dramatic coherence and the lessons were never entirely lost.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West always claimed authenticity. It was never advertised as a "show," which suggested Barnum's humbug, but as an "exhibition" or "exposition," "the real thing." John M. Burke, the general manager, publicized it as "in no wise partaking of the nature of a 'circus,'" but illustrating "life as it is witnessed on the plains," and "at once new, startling, and instructive."[2] During its heyday, the Wild West was an action-packed, patriotic pageant. Following after the bitter squabbles over Civil War and Reconstruction and the scandals of the Gilded Age, the spectacle of the frontier tamed gave reassurance of the triumph of civilization and national reconciliation.

During the 1890s the Old West theme began to be displaced by explicit comparisons between horsemen of the Old World and the New. After the 1892 London season the show added novelty acts and inflated its title to Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of the Rough Riders of the World. Nate

Salsbury explained that for the grand international Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 it had assembled "the most unique congregation of equestrians since the creation . . . for the *first time* in history—from far distant countries—differing in race, language, habits, customs, dress, as well as in skill, style and methods of horsemanship."[3] "Civilized" English Lancers, German Uhlans, French chasseurs, and U.S. cavalry competed for honors, and were matched against "primitive" horsemen—American Indians and Arabs, Argentinean gauchos and Russian cossacks.

When James A. Bailey of Barnum and Bailey's Circus became responsible for transportation, the Wild West developed a more efficient schedule. In the 1895 season it spent a hundred and ninety days in travel for a hundred and thirty-one one-day stands. By 1898 it was a huge company, requiring eight sleeping coaches for nearly seven hundred employees, fifteen cars for the eighteen buffalo and five hundred horses, sixteen flatcars for equipment (including electrical generators for lighting the night shows), and thirty-five wagons for general baggage. The show occupied almost eleven acres, and its arena, canvassed over on three sides and seating as many as fifteen thousand spectators, was a huge stage, fifty yards wide and more than a hundred yards long, and with seven panoramas, two hundred feet long and thirty feet high, as backdrops. Gradually, more traditional circus elements were added. As well as the customary white "squaw men," their Indian wives, and half-breed families, the sideshow exhibits in 1902 included a snake charmer, a fire eater, and a bearded lady. However, keeping the show on the road cost four thousand dollars a day, and as Cody's debts grew, he was compelled to merge Buffalo Bill's Wild West with Pawnee Bill's Historic Far West and Great Far East in 1908. Major Gordon W. Lillie ("Pawnee Bill") had had two failures in show business before succeeding with Pawnee Bill's Historical Wild West, Mexican Hippodrome, Indian Museum, and Grand Fireworks Exhibition in 1893. Lillie added pure circus spectacle to the program in 1909. The pageant, "The Far East, or A Dream of the Orient," brought together Rossi's Musical Elephants, a camel caravan, Bedouin and Japanese acrobats, Australian boomerang throwers, and dancers from Russia and Ceylon. "An Ethnological Congress of Strange Tribes, Clans, Races, and Nations of Peculiar Peoples"—Whirling Dervishes, Sudanese, Syrians, Moors, Persians, Dahomeans and South Sea Islanders—brought the sideshow center stage.

During its late, imperialist phase, the Wild West lost its distinctiveness. In the 1901–2 season the Indians doubled up as Chinese Boxers in the action-drama of "The Battle of Tien-Tsin" and fought under "The Royal Standard of Paganism" against the Allied "Banners of Civilization." New technology also made the touring shows obsolete, although Cody, ever hopeful for a new business opportunity, experimented with movie making, most notably in 1913. However, even before Cody's death in 1917, when scores of rivals

toured the northeast and midwest, the Wild West show was in rapid decline. Motion-picture drama and outdoor locations were more profitable. For live performances the Old West had become little more than a cultural storehouse of nostalgic memory to spice circus acts and thrilling spectacles.

Origins

One possible influence on Cody's Wild West was the exhibition of Plains Indians which P. T. Barnum arranged for his "Congress of Nations" in his New York Roman Hippodrome arena in late 1874. Barnum had displayed several small groups of Indians in the museum Lecture Room as early as 1843, and published *Life and Adventures of the Indian Chiefs, Warriors and Squaws, of the Winnebago Tribe, now exhibiting at Barnum's American Museum, New York* in 1863, perhaps profiting from interest aroused by the Minnesota Sioux uprising of 1862. He had proposed a much more ambitious show in his 1869 autobiography. Such schemes were not uncommon—John P. Clum presented "Wild Apaches" in St. Louis in 1876. In his letter to Mark Twain, Barnum explained that the Indian-Mexican battle was sandwiched between Amazon chariot races and an English fox hunt. It is possible that Cody saw it during his stay in the city for his winter theater season or during the brief tour of the Congress of Nations through eastern cities before Barnum dissolved the company.

Selected Letters of P. T. Barnum, ed. A. H. Saxon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 190.

Bridgeport, 19 January 1875
My dear Clemens,

. . . I give a scene called *Indian Life on the Plains* wherein scores of Indians of various tribes appear with their squaws, pappooses, ponies, and wigwams travelling as they do in the Indian territory. They encamp, erect their wigwams, engage in buffalo hunts with real buffaloes, give their Indian war dances, their Indian pony races, snowshoe races, foot races against horses, lasso horses and other animals, and both Indians and squaws give the most amazing specimens of riding at full speed. The Indian camp is surprised by Mexicans, and then ensues such a scene of savage strife and warfare as is never seen except upon our wild western borders.

The first "autobiography" of "Buffalo Bill," building on his dime-novel fame, appeared in 1879. A decade later, Cody's "camp-fire chats"—probably ghost-written by "Arizona" John Burke, the Wild West's publicist—was sold at the show's ticket booths. Before beginning a narrative of his life, Cody explained the grander meaning of frontier expansion.

Story of the Wild West and Camp-Fire Chats, by Buffalo Bill (Hon. W. F. Cody.) A full

and complete history of the renowned pioneer quartette, Boone, Crockett, Carson and Buffalo Bill. Replete with graphic descriptions of wild life and thrilling adventures of famous heroes of the frontier . . . (Philadelphia: Historical Publishing, 1888), v–vi, 694–95.

I have sought to describe that great general movement westward—that irresistible wave of immigration which, arrested for a time by the Alleghenies, rose until at last it broke over and spread away across mountain, stream and plain, leaving States in its wake, until stopped by the shores of the Pacific.

The evolution of government and of civilization, the adaptation of one to the other, are interesting to the student of history; but particularly fascinating is the story of the reclamation of the Great West and the supplanting of the wild savages that from primeval days were lords of the country but are now become wards of the Government, whose guardianship they were forced to recognize. This story is one well calculated to inspire a feeling of pride even in the breasts of those whose sentimentality impels to commiserate the hard lot of the poor Indian; for, rising above the formerly neglected prairies of the West are innumerable monuments of thrift, industry, intelligence, and all the contributory comforts and luxuries of a peaceful and God-fearing civilization; those evidences that proclaim to a wondering world the march of the Anglo-Saxon race towards the attainment of perfect citizenship and liberal, free, stable government.

Cody described how the idea of the Wild West evolved, after his winter triumphs on the stage, and gave no credit to his one-time partner, William Frank "Doc" Carver. In May 1883 Cody joined Carver in Omaha in the Wild West, Rocky Mountain and Prairie Exhibition, billed as "REALITY ECLIPSING ROMANCE," with "Many Types of the Pioneers and Vanguard of Civilization," and "Representatives of THE RUGGED LIFE OF PRIMITIVE MAN."[4]

When the season of 1882–83 closed I found myself richer by several thousand dollars than I had ever been before, having done a splendid business at every place where my performance was given in that year. Immense success and comparative wealth, attained in the profession of a showman, stimulated me to greater exertion and largely increased my ambition for public favor. Accordingly, I conceived the idea of organizing a large company of Indians, cow-boys, Mexican vaqueros, famous riders and expert lasso throwers, with accessories of stage coach, emigrant wagons, bucking horses and a herd of buffaloes, with which to give a realistic entertainment of wild life on the plains. To accomplish this purpose, which in many respects was a herculean undertaking, I sent agents to various points in the far West to engage Indians from several tribes, and then set about the more difficult enterprise of capturing a herd of buffaloes. After several months of patient work, I secured the services of nearly fifty cow-boys and Mexicans skilled in lasso-throwing and famous as daring riders, but when these were engaged, and several buffaloes, elk and mountain sheep were

obtained, I found all the difficulties had not yet been overcome, for such exhibitions as I had prepared to give could only be shown in large open-air enclosures, and these were not always to be rented, while those I found suitable were often inaccessible by such popular conveyances as street cars. The expenses of such a show as I had determined to give were so great that a very large crowd must be drawn to every exhibition or a financial failure would be certain; hence I soon found that my ambitious conception, instead of bringing me fortune, was more likely to end in disaster. But having gone so far in the matter I determined to see the end whatever it might be.

In the spring of 1883 (May 17th) I opened the Wild West Show at the fair grounds in Omaha, and played to very large crowds, the weather fortunately proving propitious. We played our next engagement in Springfield, Ill., and hence in all the large cities, to the seaboard. The enterprise was not a complete financial success during the first season, though everywhere our performances were attended by immense audiences.

Though I had made no money at the end of the first year, the profit came to me in the way of valuable experience and I was in no wise discouraged. Flattering offers were made me by circus organizations to go on the road as an adjunct to their exhibitions, but I refused them all, determined to win success with my prairie Wild West Show or go down in complete failure. The very large patronage I received during my first season convinced me that if I could form a partnership with some one capable of attending to the management and business details that the enterprise would prove a magnificent success, a belief that I am glad to say was speedily realized.

My career on the stage threw me in contact with a great many leading stars, and I came to have an acquaintanceship with nearly all my contemporary American actors. Among those with whom I became most intimate was Nate Salsbury, a comedian whose equal I do not believe graces the stage of either America or England today. Aside from his popularity and wealth, acquired in legitimate comedy, I knew him to be a reliable friend, and withal endowed with a rare business sagacity that gave him a reputation of being one of the very best, as well as successful, managers in the show business. Knowing his character as such, I approached him with a proposition to join me as an equal partner, in putting the Wild West entertainment again on the road. The result of my overtures was the formation of a partnership that still continues, and under the new management and partnership of Cody & Salsbury, the Wild West has won all its glory.

McLoughlin Brothers, the New York publisher and manufacturer of children's games and toys, issued a small, illustrated book of verse for the young in 1887, endorsing the Wild West. It celebrated the West as the land of the buffalo, settlers and Indians, and epic struggle between the wild and the civilizing. Buffalo Bill was central to the destiny of all three.

A Peep at Buffalo Bill's Wild West (New York: McLoughlin, 1887).

The Indian village again set up,
The squaws must remain at home
With the younger brood, to prepare the food,
While the warriors further roam.

And girt with the weapons that they have won
From enemies they have slain,
They watch and wait both early and late
The approach of the settlers train.

And Buffalo Bill, who knows their ways,
And the evil that they would do,
Puts foot to horse, and soon comes across
The track of the sneaking Sioux.

And lucky for him if the band is small
And the weapons they hold but few,
For he and his men may easily then
Disperse the blood-thirsty crew.

. . . . . .

O Buffalo Bill like a spirit rides
And dashes across the plain;
His wonderful steed to his voice gives heed
And answers the touch of the rein.

And swiftly the light lasso is flung,
And seldom is it at fault,
For it stops the speed of the flying steed
That's brought to a sudden halt.

And to tame them and train them for further use
Is a joy to Buffalo Bill,
And the cow-boys and he are as fond as can be
Of the sport that demands such skills.

And almost human the beasts become,
And though under the control of the reins
They are almost as free as they used to be
When roaming wild o'er the plains.

. . . . . .

Some horses there are that a man can trust,
But oh! it requires great pluck,
It does, indeed, to manage a steed
That is always disposed to "buck."

Origins

Then there's a fight between horse and man,
    And the strength of the will is shown;
And sometimes, alas! it comes to pass
    That the rider is finally thrown.

And all these doings recorded here
    In the haunts of the Buffalo,
Where the cowboys dwell, and the Indians yell
    Are part of the WILD WEST SHOW.

In his manuscript "Reminiscences," written the year before his death in 1902, Nate Salsbury claimed to have originated the concept of the Wild West. As an actor-manager, he had taken his company, the Salsbury Troubadors, throughout the English-speaking world in the 1870s. The inspiration for a Wild West show had first come to him, he recalled, while arguing the merits of frontier American horsemen with fellow ship passengers while returning from Australia in 1877. He conceded that Cody also experimented with cowboy shows at the same time, but Buffalo Bill was an undisciplined drunkard and lacked business sense. Only Salsbury's managerial competence had transformed the Cody-Carver combination. By 1901 Salsbury's failing health and bitter quarrels had ended their partnership. His recollections were perhaps less than charitable about Cody's energy and charisma. Salsbury had had experience of professional stage management—in farce and melodrama—but for a realistic depiction of "cow-boy" life needed the expert knowledge of the frontier and the contacts with authentic performers which Cody had.

"Nate Salsbury Originated Wild West Show Idea," *Colorado Magazine* 32 (July 1955): 206–8. A slightly different text is published as "Reminiscences by Nate Salsbury," ed. Roger Hall, *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 5 (winter 1993): 44–46, 47–48.

[In 1877] I ventured the opinion that our Cowboy and Mexican riders could beat the civilized, or uncivilized world in all that the term horsemanship implies. . . . [T]he subject stuck in my mind even after I had gone to bed that night, and the train of thought thus engendered grew upon me until it naturally turned into professional channels and I began to construct a show in my mind that would embody the whole subject of horsemanship and before I went to sleep I had mapped out in my mind a show that would be constituted of elements that had never been employed in concerted effort in the history of the show business. Of course I knew that various circus managers had tried to reproduce the riding of the plains, in made up professional riders, but I knew they had never had the real thing.

Some years passed but I had never lost sight of my plan to originate my show and put it on the road. Finally the thing took the form of resolve and I began to look up the

elements of the show. I decided that such an entertainment must have a well known figure head to attract attention and thus help to quickly solve the problem of advertising a new idea. After a careful consideration of the plan and scope of the show I resolved to get W. F. Cody as my central figure. To this end I waited a favorable opportunity to confide the scheme to him and in 1882 while we were both playing an engagement in Brooklyn or perhaps he was in New York, I made an appointment with him to meet me. . . .

As he was about at the end of his profit string on the stage I dare say he was pleased at the chance to try something else, for he grew very enthusiastic over the plan as I unfolded it to him, and was sure that the thing would be a great success. It was arranged at that lunch that I would go to Europe the following summer and look the ground over with a view to taking the show to a country where all its elements would be absolutely novel. I was quite well aware that the Dime Novel had found its way to England especially and wherever the Dime Novel had gone Cody had gone along for Ned Buntline had so firmly written Cody into contemporary history of the Great Plains that he had made a hero on paper at first hand. While on this subject I want to note what I consider a most remarkable fact. The man who today is known in the uttermost parts of the earth as a showman, would never have been a showman at all if Ned Buntline had not made him notorious and he had dripped from the point of Buntline's pen as a hero. Buntline was looking for somebody to make a hero of and first tried to boost Major Frank North into that position but the Major being a real hero would not listen to that sort of thing but said, "If you want a man to fill that bill he is over there under that wagon." Buntline went over to the wagon and woke up the man he made famous as Buffalo Bill. Between story and the stage Cody became a very popular man with a certain class of the public and was notorious enough for my purpose.

As agreed upon I went to Europe the following summer and looked the ground over. I came to the conclusion that it would take a lot of money to do the thing right and told Cody that we must be well provided with money when we made the plunge and that so far as I was concerned I did not feel rich enough to undertake my share of the expense and that I would have to wait another year before I could go into the scheme in proper shape. To this Cody did not demur, but said that he was in about the same fix as myself. So far we had arrived at a perfect understanding that we were to share and share alike in the venture. So far so good.

But, Cody must have agreed to drop the matter for another year with a strong mental reservation for I was astonished in the spring of 1883 to get a telegram (which I now have in my possession) asking me if I wanted to go into the show for this country if DR. CARVER DID NOT OBJECT. Of course I was dumbfounded and replied that I did not want to have anything to do with Doctor Carver who was a fakir in the show business and as Cody once expressed it "Went West on a piano stool."

Events proved that Cody did not wait for our plan to go to Europe to ripen but no sooner had my ideas than he began to negotiate with Carver who had a reputation as a

marksman to go in with him and was kind enough, when they had laid all their plans, to let me in as a partner. Of course I turned them down and they went on the road and made a ghastly failure. Their failure was so pronounced, that they separated at the end of the season, each blaming the other for the failure.

I was playing an engagement in Chicago, while they were there, and Cody came to see me and said that if I did not take hold of the show he was going to quit the whole thing. He said he was through with Carver and that he would not go through such another summer for a hundred thousand dollars. As I had seen their show and knew that they had not developed my ideas in putting it together at all I felt that there was still a lot of money in it if properly constructed. At the end of their term in Chicago they divided the assets of their firm and I took hold of the show under a partnership contract between Cody and myself which was drawn by John P. Altgeld who at that time was my legal adviser when I needed one.

What followed the signing of that contract is a history of the Wild West Show and is too long to recite here. I should never have put this relation of the origin of the Wild West Show on paper if there had not been in all the years that have passed a most determined effort on the part of John Burke and the other hero worshippers who have hung onto Cody's coattails for their sustenance to make Cody the originator of the show for in doing so they can edge in their own feeble claims to being an integral part of the success of the show. The men I speak of were all participants in the failure that followed the first venture by Cody and were retained by me in the management of the show by the request of Cody who lives in the worship of those who bleed him. . . .

Burke and [Jule] Keen [treasurer of the Wild West] and the rest of the Codyites who have followed the show from the day I took hold of it have never forgiven me for taking the reins of management out of their hands where they had been placed by Cody and Carver. They have always resented my presence with the show because it unseated their hero in the business saddle of the show which needed somebody that could ride it. . . .

I know that there will be a word of protest to these lines, but that the Wild West Show was an invention of my own entirely, is proven by the letters in Cody's own hand, which I have preserved, as indeed I have preserved every scrap of writing he has ever signed and addressed to me. It is lovely to be thus fortified against protestations and abuse that would surely follow if proof did not exist of what I have stated.

Extracts from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Programs

The first Wild West program of 1883 drew attention to the exhibitions of shooting and the variety of exotic equestrian acts assembled.

The Wild West, Cody and Carver's Rocky Mountain and Prairie Exhibition, with the famed Scout and Indian Fighter, Buffalo Bill (Hon. W. F. Cody) and Dr. W. F. Carver, King of riflemen, and acknowledged champion marksman of the world, will soon appear in this city. A Camp of Cheyenne, Arappahoe, Sioux and Pawnee Indians; A Group of Mexican

Vaqueros: Round-up of Western Cow-boys; Company of Prairie Scouts; A Host of Western Celebrities; A Herd of Wild Buffaloes: A Corral of Indian Mexican Burros. Artistically Blending, Life-Like, and Thrilling Pictures of Western Life (Hartford, Conn.: Calhoun Printing, 1883).

Western Cyclone!
Grand Parade

Allegorical representation of the March: Progress of Civilization. National Parks the Playground! General Equestrianism and Feats of Horsemanship! Indian Foot Races! Feats of Archery! Broncho Lassoing! Riding of Pack Ponies! Chase! Lassoing! Tying Down the Texas Bovine! Bareback Races and Trials of Speed between the Anglo-Saxon, Castilian, and Indian! The Historic Relic of the Overland Route! Indian Attack on the Deadwood Stage Coach! Rescue by the Scouts! A mimic Border War!

Indian Buffalo Dance

BUFFALO BILL in a series of Feats of agility, Grace and Skill
Dr. W. F. CARVER, and CAPTAIN BOGARDUS,
Revelations in Clay Pigeon Contests.
Mexicans, Cow-Boys, Sioux and Pawnees Struggling for Prize and Honor in Familiar Sports.

The GREAT BOGARDUS at his Shot-Gun
Major FRANK NORTH, ''White Chief of the Pawnees,'' the Pilot of the Prairies, Protector of the Border
JOHN NELSON,'Cha-sha-na-po-ge-o,' Hunter, Trapper, Whip-Interpreter
BUCK TAYLOR, the Centaur Ranchman of Prairies
JIM LAYDON, the mad Matador—Emperor of the Rope

ELK RACES,
BUFFALO HUNT
MULES, MULETEERS,
MULE RACES, Etc, Etc.
GRAND SHOOTING FETE
On Foot and Horseback, Rifle and Shot-gun

Ne Plus Ultra in Sharp-Shooting. The Phenomenally Eagle-Eyed Dr. W. F. Carver, Famed Bogardus, Old Reliable Buffalo Bill. The Whirlwind Ride of the Montezumas, surpassing the stimulating delirium of Ancient Roman Races. Attack on the Wagon Train, Deadly Combat for Love and Life between the Red Warriors and White Pioneers. Vivid War and Scalp Dances, Night-Illuminating Bon-Fires, Lurid Flames of Vivid Light, revealing Scenes of Savage Weirdness. Grand Pyrotechnic Novelties! Dazzling Wonders, forming a Brilliant Finale, delighting Thousands.

Cody and Salsbury took care to have the program copyrighted as the only legal and authentic "Wild West," "the whole invented and arranged by W. F.

Cody," to distinguish it from four other rival shows. Mark Twain wrote to Cody (as the program duly reported) that the show "stirred me like a war song."

"Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West' Prairie Exhibition, and Rocky Mountain Show, A Dramatic-Equestrian Exposition of Life on the Plains, with accompanying monologue and incidental music. The whole invented and arranged by W. F. Cody. W. F. Cody and N. Salsbury, proprietors and managers who hereby claim as their special property the various effects introduced in the public performances of Buffalo Bill's'Wild West' " (copyright deposit typescript in the Library of Congress, entered December 22, 1883, granted June 1, 1885). Reprinted in *A Treasury of American Folklore: Stories, Ballads and Traditions of the American People*, ed. B. A. Botkin (New York: Crown, 1945), 150–56.

BUFFALO BILL'S "WILD WEST"
PRAIRIE EXHIBITION, AND ROCKY MOUNTAIN SHOW,
A DRAMATIC-EQUESTRIAN EXPOSITION
OF
LIFE ON THE PLAINS,
WITH ACCOMPANYING MONOLOGUE AND INCIDENTAL MUSIC.
THE WHOLE INVENTED AND ARRANGED BY
W. F. CODY

W. F. CODY AND N. SALSBURY, PROPRIETORS AND MANAGERS
WHO HEREBY CLAIM AS THEIR SPECIAL
PROPERTY THE VARIOUS EF-
FECTS INTRODUCED IN
THE PUBLIC PER-
FORMANCES
OF
BUFFALO BILL'S "WILD WEST."

MONOLOGUE

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I desire to call your attention to an important fact. From time to time it will be my pleasure to announce to you the different features of the programme as they occur. In order that I may do so intelligently, I respectfully request your silence and attention while I am speaking. Our agents will pass among you with the biographical history of the life of Hon. William F. Cody ("Buffalo Bill,") and other celebrities, who will appear before you this afternoon. The management desires to vouch for the truth and accuracy of all the statements obtained in this book, and respectfully submitted to your attention, as helping you to understand and appreciate our entertainment. Before the entertainment begins, however, I wish to impress on your minds that what you are about to witness is not a performance in the common sense of that term, but an

exhibition of skill, on the part of the men who have acquired that quality while gaining a livelihood. Many unthinking people suppose that the different features of our exhibition are the result of what is technically called ''rehearsals.'' Such, however, is not the fact, and anyone who witnesses our performance the second time, will observe that men and animals alike are the creatures of circumstances, depending for their success upon their own skill, daring and capacity. In the East, the few who excel are known to all. In the Far West, the names we offer to you this afternoon are the synonyms of skill, courage and individual excellence. At the conclusion of the next overture our performance will commence with a grand processional parade of the ''Wild West.''

Overture, grand processional parade of cowboys,
Mexicans, and Indians, with incidental music.

I will introduce the different groups and individual celebrities as they pass before you in review.

Enter a group of Pawnee Indians. Incidental music. Enter
Chief. Music. Enter a group of Mexican vaqueros. Music.
Enter a group of Wichita Indians. Music. Enter Chief.
Music. Enter a group of American cowboys. Music. Enter
King of Cowboys. Music. Enter Cowboy Sheriff of the
Platte. Music. Enter a group of Sioux Indians. Music.
Enter Chief. Music.

I next have the honor of introducing to your attention a man whose record as a servant of the government, whose skill and daring as a frontiersman, whose place in history as the king of the scouts of the United States Army, under such generals as Sherman, Sheridan, Hancock, Terry, Miles, Hazen, Royal, Merrit, Crook, Carr and others, and whose name as one of the avengers of the lamented Custer, and whose adherence throughout an eventful life to his chosen principle of ''true to friend and foe,'' have made him well and popularly known throughout the world. You know to whom I allude—the Honorable William F. Cody, ''Buffalo Bill.''

Enter Cody. Bugle Call. Cody speaks.

Ladies and gentlemen: allow me to introduce the equestrian portion of the Wild West Exhibition.

Turns to review.

Wild West, are you ready? Go!

Exeunt omnes.

First on our programme, a———mile race, between a cow boy, a Mexican, and an Indian, starting at———. You will notice that these horses carry the heaviest trapping, and that neither of the riders weigh less than 145 pounds.

Next on the programme, the Pony Express. The Pony Express was established long before the Union Pacific Rail Road was built across the continent, or even before the telegraph poles were set, and when Abraham Lincoln was elected president of

the United States, it was important that the election returns from California should be brought across the mountains as quickly as possible. Mr. William Russell, the great government freighter, who at the time was in Washington, first proposed the Pony Express. He was told it would take too long—17 or 18 days. The result was a wager of $200,000 that the time could be made in less than ten days, and it was, the actual time being nine days, seventeen hours, leaving seven hours to spare, and winning the wager of two hundred thousand dollars. Mr. Billy Johnson will illustrate the mode of riding the Pony Express, mounting, dismounting and changing the mail to fresh horses.

Music. Enter Express rider, changing horse in front of the grand stand, and exit.

Next on our programme, a one hundred yard race between an Indian on foot, and an Indian on an Indian pony, starting at a given point, running fifty yards, and returning to the starting point—virtually a race of a hundred yards.

Race as described above. Music.

Next on our programme, an historical representation between Buffalo Bill and Yellow Hand, fought during the Sitting Bull war, on the 17th. of July, 1876, at War Bonnet Creek, Dakota, shortly after the massacre of Custer. The fight was witnessed by General Carr's command and the Sioux army, and resulted in the death of Yellow Hand, and the first scalp taken in revenge of Custer's fate.

Duel as described above. Cody, supported by cow boys, etc., Yellow Hand by Indians. Music.

I have the pleasure of introducing Mr. Seth Clover. Mr. Clover will give an exhibition of his skill, shooting with a Winchester repeating rifle, at composition balls thrown from the hand.

Clover shoots as above.

Shooting two balls thrown in the air at the same time. You will notice that Mr. Clov[er] is obliged to replace the discharged cartridge before he can shoot at the second ball.

Shoots as above.

Obscuring the sight by placing a card over the rifle.

Shoots as above.

If any gentleman has a half-dollar he would like to have mutilated and take home as a pocket piece, if he will throw it in upon the track, where we can get it, Mr. Clover will try and oblige him.

Shoots coin as above.

Shooting at a nickel.

Shoots as above.

Shooting at a marble. You will notice that the mark is hardly larger than the bullet shot at it.

Shoots as above.

Shooting a number of composition balls thrown in rapid succession.

Shoots as above. Exit.

I have the pleasure of introducing Master Johnny Baker of North Platte, Neb., known as the Cow Boy Kid. Master Johnny is 16 years of age, and the holder of the boy's champion badge, for rifle and revolver shooting, and stands ready to meet any opponent of his age. Master Baker will give an exhibition of his skill, holding his rifle in various positions.

Holding the rifle sideways.

Holding the rifle to the left shoulder.

Holding the rifle upside down, on the top of his head.

Standing with his back to the target, bending forward, and shooting between his knees.

Leaning backward, over a support, and shooting over his head.

Standing with his back to the target, and taking aim by the aid of a small mirror.

Shooting composition balls thrown in air.

Shoots each shot as above. Exit.

Miss Annie Oakley, the celebrated wing and rifle shot. Miss Oakley will give an exhibition of her skill, shooting with a shot gun at Ligowsky patent clay pigeons, holding the gun in various positions.

Shoots pigeons sprung from trap.

Shooting double, from two traps, sprung at the same time.

Shoots as above.

Picking the gun from the ground after the trap is sprung.

Shoots as above.

Shooting double in the same manner.

Shoots as above.

Shooting three composition balls, thrown in the air in rapid succession, the first with the rifle held upside down upon the head, the second and third with the shot gun.

Shoots as above. Exit.

Next on our programme, the Cow Boy's Fun, or the riding of bucking ponies and mules, by Mr. ____, Mr. ____, and Mr. ____. There is an impression in the minds of many people that these horses are taught or trained to buck, or that they are compelled to do so by having foreign substances placed under their saddles. This, however, is not the fact. Bucking, the same as walking or running away is a natural trait of the animal, confirmed by habit.

Riders announced, and mount in succession.

Watch Mr. Taylor pick up his hat.

Taylor rides past at full sped, leans out of the saddle and

picks up hat from the ground.

Watch Mr. Taylor pick up handkerchief.

Taylor rides past at full sped, leans out of the saddle and picks up handkerchief.

Hon. William F. Cody, Champion All-Round Shot of the World.

Enter Mr. Cody.

Mr. Cody will give an exhibition of his skill, shooting with shot gun rifle and revolver at clay pigeons and composition balls, shooting first with a shot gun at clay pigeons, pulling the traps himself, (*Shoots.*) shooting clay pigeons in the American style of holding the gun, the butt of the gun below his elbow. (*Shoots.*)

Shooting clay pigeons in the English style of holding the gun, the butt of the gun below the arm-pit. Please notice the change of position. (*Shoots.*)

Shooting clay pigeons standing with his back to the trap, turning and breaking the pigeon while it is in the air. (*Shoots.*)

Shooting with his back to the trap, gun over his shoulder, turning and pulling the traps himself. (*Shoots.*)

Holding the gun with one hand. (*Shoots.*)

Holding the gun with one hand, pulling the trap with the other. (*Shoots.*)

Shooting clay pigeons double from two traps, sprung at the same time. (*Shoots.*)

Shooting clay pigeons double, pulling the traps himself. (*Shoots.*)

Shooting twenty clay pigeons inside of one minute and thirty seconds. Any gentleman desiring to hold the time on this feat, will please take it, not from the pulling of the trap, but from the first crack of the gun. (*Shoots.*)

Mr. Cody will shoot next with a Winchester repeating rifle, at composition balls, thrown from the hand while he rides upon his horse. (*Shoots.*)

Missing with the first shot, hitting with the second. (*Shoots.*)

Missing twice, hitting the third time. (*Shoots.*)

Hitting three balls thrown in the air at the same time. (*Shoots.*)

Hitting a ball thrown from behind. (*Shoots.*)

Hitting a ball thrown to either side. (*Shoots.*)

Hitting a number of balls thrown in the air in rapid succession. (*Shoots.*)

Hitting a ball thrown in the air while he rides past it at full speed, a shot accomplished by no other marksman. (*Shoots.*)

Mr. Cody will next attempt the great double shot, hitting two balls thrown in the air at the same time, as he rides past at full speed. (*Shoots.*)

Hitting composition balls thrown in the air, while marksman and object thrower ride side by side at full speed, thus forming a picture of combined horsemanship and marksmanship never before presented to a public audience. (*Shoots.*)

Hitting composition balls thrown in the air with an ordinary Colt's army revolver. (*Shoots.*)

THE WILD WEST SHOW

Next on our programme, the Deadwood Stage coach, formerly the property of Gilmore, Salsbury, & Co., and plying between Deadwood and Cheyenne. The coach has an immortal place in American history, having been baptised many times by fire and blood. The gentleman holding the reins, is Mr. John Higby, an old stage driver, and formerly the companion of Hank Monk, of whom you have all probably read. Seated beside him is Mr. John Hancock, known in the West as the wizard hunter of the Platte Valley. Broncho Bill will act as out rider, a position he has occupied in earnest many times with credit. Upon the roof of the coach is seated Mr. Con Groner, the cow boy sheriff of the Platte, to whose intrepid administration of that office for several consecutive terms, covering a period of six years, Lincoln County, Neb., and its vicinity are indebted for the peace and quiet that now reigns. Mr. Groner's efforts having driven out the cattle thief and hoodlum element that formerly infested that section of the county, noticeably, the notorious Middleton gang. The coach will start upon its journey, be attacked from an ambush by a band of fierce and warlike Indians, who in their turn will be repulsed by a party of scouts and cow boys, under the command of Buffalo Bill. Will two or three ladies and gentlemen volunteer to ride as passengers.

After passengers are seated in coach.

It is customary to deliver parting instructions to the driver as he starts on his perilous journey, something in the following fashion: Mr. Higby, I have intrusted you with valuable lives and property. Should you meet with Indians, or other dangers, *en route,* put on the whip, and if possible, save the lives of your passengers. If you are ready, go!

Coach is driven down track, meets Indians, turns, followed by Indians. Battle back to stand. Cody and cow boys come to rescue. Battle past stand. Cody, coach and cow boys return to stand. Exit omnes.

Next on our programme, a one-quarter mile race between Sioux boys and on bare backed Indian ponies from the Honorable William F. Cody's ranch at North Platte, Neb., starting at———.

Race as above. Music.

I would next call to your attention to an exciting race between Mexican thoroughbreds. These animals are bred with great care and at considerable expense, their original cost being sixteen dollars per dozen. All up! No jockeying! Go!

Race as above. Music. "We Won't Come Home Til Morning."

A portion of the Pawnees and Wichita tribes will illustrate their native sports and pastimes, giving first the war dance.

War dance by Indians.

Next the grass dance.

Grass dance by Indians.

Next, the scalp dance, in which the women of the tribe are allowed to participate.

Scalp dance by Indians and squaws.

Keep your eye on the burros!

Burros return. Music. "Home Again!" or "We never speak, as, etc."

I have the pleasure of introducing "Mustang Jack," or as the Indians call him, "Pet-ze-ka-we-cha-cha," the great high jumper. Jack is the champion jumper among the cow boys of the West, and stands ready to jump with anybody in any manner or style for any amount of money. He will give you an exhibition of his skill, jumping over various animals, beginning with the small burro.

Jack jumps over burro.

Jumping twenty-four feet in two jumps, and clearing the burro in the second jump.

Jack jumps as above.

Jumping the Indian pony, Cha-sha-sha-na-po-geo, a feat which gave him the name of

"Mustang Jack."

Jumps as above.

Next, jumping the tall white horse "Doc. Powell," sixteen and a half hands high. The best recorded standing high jump is one of five feet and three inches made by Mr. Johnson, of England. In order to clear this horse, Jack is obliged to make a jump of nearly six feet, thus beating the record daily.

Jumps as above.

Next on our programme the roping, tyeing and riding of wild Texan steers by cow boys and Mexicans.

Performance as above.

Next on our programme the riding of a wild elk, by Master Voter Hall, a Feejee Indian from Africa.

Saddled elk ridden as above.

Next on our programme the attack upon a settler's cabin by a band of marauding Indians, and their repulse, by a party of scouts and cow boys, under the command of Buffalo Bill. After our entertainment you are invited to visit the Wild West camp. We thank you for your polite attention, and bid you all good afternoon.

Battle as above. Review before the grand stand. Adieus and dismissal by Mr. Cody.

FINIS.

Programme.

Subject to Changes and Additions

THE WILD WEST SHOW

1.—GRAND PROCESSIONAL REVIEW.

2.—ENTREE. Introduction of individual Celebrities, Groups, etc.

3.—RACE between Cow-boy, Mexican, and Indian on Ponies.

4.—PONY EXPRESS, ridden by Billy Johnson, Illustrating Mode of Conveying Mails on the Frontier.

5.—RIFLE SHOOTING by Johnnie Baker, the ''Cow-boy Kid.''

6.—DUEL between BUFFALO BILL and Chief Yellow Hand, and Indian Battle, ''First Scalp for Custer.''

7.—WING SHOOTING, by Miss Annie Oakley.

8.—THE COW-BOY'S FUN. Throwing the Lariat, Riding Bucking Ponies and Mules, by Buck Taylor, Bill Bullock, Tony Esquival, Jim Kidd, Dick Johnson, and Cow-boys.

9.—RIFLE SHOOTING, by Miss Lillian F. Smith, ''The California Girl.''

10.—RACE, ridden by Lady Riders.

11.—ATTACK UPON THE DEADWOOD STAGE COACH, by Indians. Repulsed by Cow-boys commanded by BUFFALO BILL.

12.—RACE between Sioux Boys on bareback Indian Ponies.

13.—RACE between Mexican Thoroughbreds.

14.—PHASES OF INDIAN LIFE. A nomadic tribe camps upon the prairie, the attack of the hostile tribe, followed by scalp, war, and other dances.

15.—MUSTANG JACK (Petz-ze-ka-we-cha-cha), the Wonderful Jumper.

16.—Hon. W. F. CODY, ''BUFFALO BILL,'' America's Great Practical All-Around Shot.

17.—RIDING AND ROPING OF WILD TEXAS STEERS by Cow-boys and Mexicans.

18.—THE BUFFALO HUNT, BUFFALO BILL assisted by Sioux, Pawnee, Wichita, and Comanche Indians.

19.—THE ATTACK ON THE SETTLER'S CABIN by Marauding Indians; the Battle and Repulse by BUFFALO BILL Leading Cow-boys and Mexicans.

20.—SALUTE.

The Wild West began its third season on April 11, 1885, by moving from winter quarters in New Orleans to Mobile, Alabama. Before closing at St. Louis Fair on October 11, it visited more than forty of the larger cities in the eastern United States and Canada. Chief Sitting Bull of the Hunkpapa Sioux joined the Grand Processional at Buffalo in June for his one and only season. The program contained snippets of information on western topics, including a poem reprinted from *Beadle's Weekly*. The stilted, archaic language typified the dime novel.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West. America's National Entertainment led by the famed scout and guide Buffalo Bill (Hon. W. F. Cody) (Hartford, Conn.: Calhoun Printing, 1885).

Cody's Corral; or, the Scouts and the Sioux
By "Buckskin Sam."

A mount-inclosed valley, close sprinkled with fair flowers,
As if a shattered rainbow had fallen there in showers;
Bright-plumaged birds were warbling their songs among the trees,
Or fluttering their tiny wings in the cooling Western breeze.
The cottonwoods, by mountain's base, on every side high tower,
And the dreamy haze in silence marks the sleepy noontide hour.
East, south, and north, to meet the clouds the lofty mounts arise,
Guarding this little valley—a wild Western Paradise
Pure and untrampled as it looks, this lovely flower-strewn sod—
One scarce would think that e'er, by man, had such a sward been trod.
But yonder, see those wild mustangs by lariat held in check,
Tearing up the fairest flora, which fairies might bedeck;
And, near a camp fire's smoke, we see man standing all around—
'Tis strange, for from them has not come a single word or sound.
Standing by cottonwood, with arms folded on his breast,
Gazing with his eagle eyes up to the mountain's crest,
Tall and commanding is his form, and graceful is his mien;
As fair in face, as noble, has seldom here been seen,
A score or more of frontiersmen recline upon the ground,
But starting soon upon their feet, by sudden snort and bound!
A horse has sure been frightened by strange scent on the breeze,
And glances now by all are cast beneath the towering trees.
A quiet sign their leader gives, and mustangs now are brought;
And, by swift-circling lasso, a loose one fast is caught.
Then thundering round the mountain's dark adamantine side,
A hundred hideous, painted, and fierce Sioux warriors ride;
While, from their throats, the well-known and horrible death-knell,
The wild, blood-curdling war-whoop, and the fierce and fiendish yell
Strikes the ears of all, now ready to fight, and e'en to die,
In that mount-inclosed valley, beneath that blood-red sky!
Now rings throughout the open, on all sides clear and shrill,
The dreaded battle-cry of him whom men call Buffalo Bill!
On, like a whirlwind, then they dash—the brave scouts of the plains
Their rifles soft caressed by mustangs' flying manes!
On, like an avalanche, they sweep through the tall prairie grass;
Down, fast upon them, swooping, the dread and savage mass!
Wild yells of fierce bravado come, and taunts of deep despair;
While, through the battle-smoke, there flaunts each feathered tuft of hair.

And loudly rings the war-cry of fearless Buffalo Bill;
And loudly ring the savage yells, which make the blood ring chill!
The gurgling death-cry mingles with the mustang's shrillest scream,
And sound of dull and sodden falls, and bowie's brightest gleam.
At length there slowly rises the smoke from heaps of slain,
Whose wild war-cries will nevermore ring on the air again.
Then, panting and bespattered from the showers of foam and blood,
The scouts have once more halted 'neath the shady cottonwood.
In haste they are reloading, and preparing for a sally,
While the scattered foe, now desperate, are yelling in the valley.
Again are heard revolvers, with their rattling, sharp report;
Again the scouts are seen to charge down on that wild cohort.
Sioux fall around, like dead reeds when fiercest northers blow,
And rapid sink in death before their hated pale-face foe!
Sad, smothered now is the music from the mountain's rippling rill,
But wild hurrahs instead are heard from our brave Buffalo Bill,
Who, through the thickest carnage, charged ever in the van,
And cheered faint hearts around him, since first the fight began!
Deeply demoralized, the Sioux fly fast with bated breath,
And glances cast of terror along that vale of death;
While their victors quick dismounted, and looking all around,
On their dead and mangled enemies, whose corses strewed the ground.
"I had sworn I would avenge them"—were the words of Buffalo Bill—
"The mothers and their infants they slew at Medicine Hill.
Our work is done—done nobly—I looked for that from you;
Boys, when a cause is just, you need but to stand firm and true!"

In 1893 the Wild West had a large site between 62d and 63d Streets outside the World's Fair grounds in Chicago, and opposite the elevated railroad station and close to the Midway Plaisance funfair. With two shows a day, and a covered grandstand capable of holding eighteen thousand, Cody and Salsbury enjoyed their best season with the crowds who came to the Columbian Exposition and made perhaps a million dollars' profit in six months. After nearly a decade touring, experience had confirmed which elements were popular with the crowds, and the program had a more coherent narrative structure of struggle and contest. European horsemen added dashing uniforms and international rivalry.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World: Historical Sketches and Programme (Chicago: n.p., 1893), [1], 4, 9–10, 62, 23, 13.

BUFFALO BILL'S
WILD WEST

Extracts from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Programs

AND

CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD

PROGRAMME

OVERTURE, ''Star Spangled Banner'' . . Cowboy Band, Wm. Sweeny, Leader

1—GRAND REVIEW introducing the Rough Riders of the World and Fully Equipped Regular Soldiers of the Armies of America, England, France, Germany, and Russia.

2—MISS ANNIE OAKLEY, Celebrated Shot, who will illustrate her dexterity in the use of Fire-arms.

3—HORSE RACE between a Cowboy, a Cossack, a Mexican, an Arab, and an Indian, on Spanish-Mexican, Broncho, Russian, Indian and Arabian Horses.

4—PONY EXPRESS. The Former Pony Post Rider will show how the Letters and Telegrams of the Republic were distributed across the immense Continent previous to the Railways and the Telegraph.

5—ILLUSTRATING A PRAIRIE EMIGRANT TRAIN CROSSING THE PLAINS. Attack by marauding Indians repulsed by ''Buffalo Bill,'' with Scouts and Cowboys.

N.B.—The wagons are the same as used 35 years ago.

6—A GROUP OF SYRIAN AND ARABIAN HORSEMEN will illustrate their style of Horsemanship, with Native Sports and Pastimes.

7—COSSACKS, of the Caucasus of Russia, in Feats of Horsemanship, Native Dances, etc.

8—JOHNNY BAKER, Celebrated Young American Marksman.

9—A GROUP OF MEXICANS from Old Mexico, will illustrate the use of the Lasso, and perform various Feats of Horsemanship.

10—RACING BETWEEN PRAIRIE, SPANISH AND INDIAN GIRLS.

11—COWBOY FUN. Picking Objects from the Ground, Lassoing Wild Horses, Riding the Buckers.

12—MILITARY EVOLUTIONS by a Company of the Sixth Cavalry of the United States Army; a Company of the First Grand Uhlan Regiment of His Majesty King William II, German Emperor, popularly known as the ''Potsdamer Reds''; a Company of French Chasseurs (Chasseurs a Cheval de la Garde Republique Francaise); and a Company of the 12th Lancers (Prince of Wales' Regiment) of the British Army.

13—CAPTURE OF THE DEADWOOD MAIL COACH BY THE INDIANS, which will be rescued by ''Buffalo Bill'' and his attendant Cowboys.

N.B.—This is the identical old Deadwood Coach, called the Mail Coach, which is famous on account of having carried the great number of people who lost their lives on the road between Deadwood and Cheyenne 18 years ago. Now the most famous vehicle extant.

14—RACING BETWEEN INDIAN BOYS ON BAREBACK HORSES.

15—LIFE CUSTOMS OF THE INDIANS. Indian settlement on the Field and ''Path.''

16—COL. W. F. CODY, (''Buffalo Bill''), in his Unique Feats of Sharpshooting.

17—BUFFALO HUNT, as it is in the Far West of North America—''Buffalo Bill'' and Indians. The last of the only known Native Herd.

18—THE BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BIG HORN, Showing with Historical Accuracy the scene of CUSTER'S LAST CHARGE.

19—SALUTE.

CONCLUSION.

The program's introduction drew attention to the epic struggle, with a hero to match. "Young, sturdy, a remarkable specimen of manly beauty, with the brain to conceive and the nerve to execute, Buffalo Bill *par excellence* is the exemplar of the strong and unique traits that characterize *a true American frontiersman*."

SALUTATORY.

There is probably no field in modern American history more fascinating in the intensity of its interest than that which is presented in our rapidly-extending frontier. The pressure of the white man, the movement of the emigrant train, and the extension of our railways, together with the military power of the General Government, have, in a measure, broken down the barriers behind which the Indian fought and defied the advance of civilization; but the West, in many places, is still a scene of wildness, where the sternness of the law is upheld at the pistol point, and the white man and outlaw has become scarcely less dangerous than his red-skinned predecessor. (*This last, while perfectly true when written* (1883), *is at present* [ten years later] *inapplicable, so fast does law and order progress and pervade the Grand West*).

The story of our country, so far as it concerns lif e in the vast Rocky Mountain region and on the plains, has never been half told; and romance itself falls far short of the reality when it attempts to depict the career of the little vanguard of pioneers, trappers, and scouts, who, moving always in front, have paved the way—frequently with their own bodies—for the safe approach of the masses behind. The names of "OLD JIM BRIDGER," "KIT CARSON," "WHITE BEAVER," "WILD BILL," "CALIFORNIA JOE," "BUFFALO WHITE," "TEXAS JACK," "BUFFALO BILL," "MAJOR NORTH," and scores of others, have already become identified with what seem to be strange legends and traditions, and yet the lives and labors of these men form a part of the development of the great West. Most of them have died fighting bravely, and all of them, in their way, have been men around whose exploits contemporaneous writers in and out of the army have thrown the halo of heroism. Our most distinguished officers have repeatedly borne tribute to their usefulness and valor, and to-day the adventures of the Army Scout constitute a theme of never-ending interest. Keen of eye, sturdy in build, inured to hardship, experienced in the knowledge of Indian habits and language, familiar with the hunt, and trustworthy in the hour of extremest danger, they belong to a class that is rapidly disappearing from our country.

In the Eastern States, or even east of the Mississippi, the methods of these people are comparatively unknown, and it is for the purpose of introducing them to the public that this little pamphlet has been prepared. HON. WILLIAM F. CODY ("BUF-

FALO BILL''), in conjunction with MR. NATE SALSBURY, the eminent American actor (a ranch owner), has organized a large combination that, in its several aspects, will illustrate life as it is witnessed on the plains; the Indian encampment; the cowboys and vaqueros; the herds of buffalo and elk; the lassoing of animals; the manner of robbing mail coaches; feats of agility, marksmanship, archery, and the kindred scenes and events that are characteristic of the border. The most completely appointed delegation of frontiersmen and Indians that ever visited the East will take part in the entertainment, together with a large number of animals; and the performance, while in no wise partaking of the nature of a ''circus,'' will be at once new, startling, and instructive.

JOHN M. BURKE,
North Platte, Neb., May 1, 1883. *General Manager*

The exhibitions given by ''BUFFALO BILL'S'' Wild West have nothing in common with the usual professional exhibitions. Their merits are dependent on training of a natural kind.

Our aim is to make the public acquainted with the manners and customs of daily life of the dwellers in the far West of the United States, through the means of actual and realistic scenes from life. At each performance marked skill and daring are presented. Not only from the standpoint of the spectator, but also from a critical point of view, we assure the auditor that each scene presents a faithful picture of the habits of these folk, down to the smallest detail.

All the horses are descendants of those brought to America by the Spaniards, under Ferdinand Cortez. The whole material of harness, etc., is genuine, and has already been seasoned by many years' experienced use in their original wilds. We congratulate ourselves as being the first to successfully unite in an entertainment all their historic peculiarities.

After having earned the applause of the public and the flattering opinion of the press of the world, . . . we have the honor to place ourselves once more at the service of the American public, presenting in conjunction with the original Wild West features, a congress of the Rough Riders of the World. This assemblage of primitive horsemen meet for the *first time* in history—from far distant countries—differing in race, language, habits, customs, dress, as well as in skill, style and methods of horsemanship, forming the most unique congregation of equestrians since the creation.

NATE SALSBURY, *Vice-President and Manager*

. . . The nationally known Brick Pomeroy thus writes:—''. . . The true Western man is free, fearless, generous and chivalrous. Of this class, Hon. Wm. F. Cody,'Buffalo Bill,' is a bright representative. As a part of his rushing career he has brought together material for what he correctly terms a Wild West Exhibition. I should call it a Wild West Reality. The idea is not merely to take in money from those who witness a very lively exhibition, but to give people in the East a correct representation of life on the plains,

and the incidental life of the hardy, brave, intelligent pioneers, who are the first to blaze the way to the future homes and greatness of America. He knows the worth and sturdiness of true Western character, and as a lover of his country, wishes to present as many facts as possible to the public, so that those who will, can see actual pictures of life in the West, brought to the East for the inspection and education of the public.

'' 'Buffalo Bill' has brought the Wild West to the doors of the East. There is more of real life, of genuine interest, of positive education in this startling exhibition, than I have ever before seen, and it is true to nature and life as it really is with those who are smoothing the way for millions to follow. All of this imaginary Romeo and Juliet business sinks to utter insignificance in comparison to the drama of existence as is here enacted, and all the operas in the world appear like pretty playthings for emasculated children by the side of the setting of reality, and the muse of the frontier as so faithfully and extensively presented, and so cleverly managed by this incomparable representative of Western pluck, coolness, bravery, independence, and generosity. . . .

He deserves well for his efforts to please and to instruct in matters important to America, and incidents that are passing *never more to return*.'' . . .

[I]t cannot be denied that an added chapter to Indian history, and the Wild West's peculiar province of truthfully exhibiting the same, is rendered more valuable to the student of primitive man, and to the ethnologists' acquaintance with the strange people whose grand and once happy empire (plethoric in all its inhabitants needed) has been (rightfully or wrongfully) brought thoroughly and efficiently under the control of our civilization, or (possibly more candidly confessed) under the Anglo-Saxon's commercial necessities. . . . [O]ur boasted civilization has a wonderful adaptability to the good soils, the productive portions and the rich mineral lands of the earth. . . .

A sentimental view is thus inspired, when long personal association has brought the better qualities of the Indian to one's notice, assisting somewhat to dispel the prejudices engendered by years of savage brutal wars (conducted with a ferocious vindictiveness foreign to our methods). The savageness of Indian warfare, born in the victim, and probably intensified by the instinctive knowledge of a despairing weakness that renders desperate the fiery spirit of expiring resistance, which latter (in another cause) might be held up for courage and tenacity. . . .

But then again the practical view of the non-industrious use of nature's cornucopia of world-needed resources and the inevitable law of *the survival of the fittest*, must ''bring the flattering unction to the soul'' of those—to whom the music of light, work, and progress, is the charm, the *gauge* of existence's worth, and to which the listless must hearken, the indolent attend, the weak imbibe strength from—whose ranks the red man must join, and advancing with whose steps march cheerily to the tune of honest toil, industrious peace, and placid fireside prosperity.

The program's sixty-four pages carried lengthy endorsements of the show's authenticity, biographies of its stars, and a narrative of its success in Europe.

Among the background stories of frontier "history almost passed away," were tributes to the weapons of struggle on the frontier with which savage met civilized.

The Rifle as an Aid to Civilization

There is a trite saying that "the pen is mightier than the sword." It is an equally true one that the bullet is the pioneer of civilization, for it has gone hand in hand with the axe that cleared the forest, and with the family bible and school book. Deadly as has been its mission in one sense, it has been merciful in another; for without the rifle ball we of America would not be to-day in the possession of a free and united country, and mighty in our strength.

And so has it been in the history of all people, from the time when David slew Goliath, down through the long line of ages, until, in modern times, science has substituted for the stone from David's sling the terrible missiles that now decide the fate of nations. It is not, therefore, so harsh an expression as it seems to be at first sight, that it is indeed the bullet which has been the forerunner of growth and development.

It is in the far West of America, however, and along our frontier, that the rifle has found its greatest use and become a part of the person and the household of the venturesome settler, the guide, the scout, and the soldier; for nowhere else in Christendom is it so much and so frequently a necessity for the preservation of life and the defence of home and property. It is here, too, among the hunters on the plains and in the Rocky Mountains, that one sees the perfection of that skill in marksmanship that has become the wonder of those who are not accustomed to the daily use of weapons. Yet if it were not possessed—if there were not the quick eye, the sure aim, coolness in the moment of extreme danger, whether threatened by man or beast—life in that section would be of little value, and a man's home anything but a safe abiding place.

There are exceptional cases of men like Buffalo Bill, Dr. Carver, and others, whose names are more or less familiar among the mighty hunters of the West, who excel in the use of rifle and pistol, and to which, time and time again, they and those around them have owed their lives. And they are the worthy successors of a long line of marksmen, whose names are also "familiar as household words." Who does not recall David Crockett and his death-dealing rifle in the Alamo? Daniel Boone, of Kentucky, and the heroic exploits that have been written concerning them in the early pages of our country's history?

It is to the end that the people of the East, or rather those who are not acquainted with the rough life of the border, and especially that portion of it in which the rifle plays so important a part, may personally witness some of the feats of Western men, that Messrs. Cody & Carver have determined to introduce in their "great realistic pictures of Western life" a series of shooting exhibitions, in which they will both have the assistance of the celebrated pigeon shot, Capt. Bogardus. The manner in which buf-

falo are hunted, the exciting chase at close quarters, the splendidly trained horses who participate in the chase, the hunt for elk, the stealthy devices of Indians in capturing the fleet-footed animals—all these will be illustrated in a manner that never have been witnessed east of the Mississippi River. . . .

The Bow and Arrow

The bow is the natural weapon of the wild tribes of the West. Previous to the introduction of firearms it was the weapon supreme of every savage's outfit—in fact his principal dependence, backed by personal skill in its use for sustenance for himself and his pappooses. It still retains its favor, as it is not always safe to rely on the white man's mechanism, as in case of lack of ammunition or deranged lock or trigger, time and location prevent its being ''mended.'' As a weapon of economy it is also to be commended, as the hunting arrow is made so that the rear shoulders of the long tapering blade slope backward, thus facilitating its withdrawal from the wounded game. On the other hand, in the war arrow, the rear shoulders slope forward, forming barbs, as it is intended to remain and eventually kill. The possession, therefore, of firearms has not affected the Indian's love of this reliable weapon of the chase, which being his first childish plaything is still, no matter how well armed or rich he may be, an indispensable possession. At short distances it is a terribly effective arm, and the Indian expert can seize five to ten arrows in his left hand and dispatch them with such rapidity that the last will be on its flight before the first touches the ground. In close quarters they prefer to rely on it to depending on the rifle, as it can be of deadly force at thirty to forty yards, and creating a bad wound at much greater distance. In buffalo hunting, where the horseman can approach near, it is invaluable and economic, and is often buried to the feathers. ''Two Lance,'' an Indian chief, during the Grand Duke's hunt, sent an arrow clear through a bison, Alexis retaining the light-winged messenger of death as a souvenir of his hunt on the American Plains.

Exhibiting Indians

Hundreds of medicine-show "Indians," accompanied by a few white "Indian fighters," visited small towns in the late nineteenth century, dispensing cure-alls flavored with free entertainment. The troupes most imitated were the "encampments" of the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company, founded by John Healy and Charles Bigelow in 1881. In the open air, in tents, or in town halls, warriors from the Kickapoo wigwams danced with blood-curdling cries and then, guided by the lecturer, explained in broken English the life-enhancing qualities of their Sagwa, the restorative which gave the savages such remarkable health. In towns far too small ever to host the huge Buffalo Bill extravaganza, the tent shows mixed vaudeville sketches with romance. Many of the Indians were genuine, if never Kickapoo. The mock Wild West posters and program offered trick-shooting by the Cody-lookalikes, Nevada

Ned Oliver or Texas Charlie, and insight into Indian "ways, customs and habits" by a dozen exotic purveyors of patent medicine. Carl Sandburg recalled the summer visits to Galesburg, Illinois, of the Kickapoo "stomping and howling their lonesome war songs," and remembered the slick barkers touting the various concoctions which dressed piles or developed the squaw's chest. And all for free, or only fifty cents or a dollar for Sagwa or salve or worm killer.

Life and Scenes among the Kickapoo Indians; their manners, habits and customs. Containing a Graphic Description of Texas Charlie's adventures in the Wild West among the Indians, and the discovery of the wondrous Kickapoo Medicine Men, together with their remedies and the marvellous cures effected by them (New Haven: Healy and Bigelow, n.d. [1890s]), 94.

In order to Portray to the Civilized World Genuine scenes in Indian Life, Messrs. Healy & Bigelow, the Eastern Agents of the Kickapoo Indians, have, at an enormous outlay, perfected arrangements whereby they will be enabled to make

A GRAND TOUR OF THE UNITED STATES,
VISITING THE PRINCIPAL CITIES AND TOWNS,
Bringing with them their Squaws, Medicine Men
AND PAPPOOSES,
Encamping out in the Summer Time in their Wigwams and Tents,
As they do on the Plains,
And in the Winter time in Public Halls.
BY THIS UNIQUE PLAN
Genuine Indian Life and Scenes
WILL BE
BROUGHT TO YOUR OWN DOOR
By these Children of the Forest.
In order to more fully illustrate life on the Plains, they will give
FREE EXHIBITIONS
During their visit, introducing the
Scalp, Buffalo and War Dances,

Together with other wonderful and curious features of the aborigines of the Far West.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West spent the 1894 season in greater New York. For five cents, patrons could travel from Manhattan's Battery to the 39th Street ferry in South Brooklyn and pay fifty cents for general admission to the Ambrose Park grounds. However, in the summer, when the journalist Julian Ralph and the artist Frederick Remington visited the Indian encampment outside the show arena, times were difficult. The covered grandstand held 20,000, but was rarely full for the two performances a day at 3:00 and 8:15.


ALL ROADS LEAD TO
BUFFALO BILL'S
WILD WEST
AND
CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD
HOW TO GET THERE FOR 5 & 10 CENTS
AT AMBROSE PARK
39TH STREET FERRY SOUTH BROOKLYN
ALL ELEVATED, STEAM, STREET & MOTOR CARS & FERRIES, CONNECTING WITH BATTERY WHITE HALL 3 & ENABLE YOU TO LAND DIRECT AT CAMP.
EXCURSION STEAMERS FROM ALL POINTS
2
PERFORMANCES DAILY AT 3 PM 8 PM
RAIN OR SHINE
GENERAL ADMISSION
50 CENTS
COVERED GRAND STAND
SEATING 20,000
"WHERE WE ARE"

The 1894 Wild West poster gave precise directions to Ambrose Park in Brooklyn. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.

Even before Nate Salsbury fell ill, the show failed to meet its daily expenses of $4,000, and losses mounted. John Burke, the Wild West's shrewd publicist, played a key role in briefing journalists and encouraging favorable reports. Julian Ralph had spent two years traveling in the Far West reporting for *Harper's*, and in both books he published in 1893—*Our Great West* and *Chicago and the World's Fair*—he showed particular interest in the "primitive" family in its "native habitation."

Julian Ralph, "Behind The 'Wild West' Scenes," *Harper's Weekly* 38 (August 18, 1894): 775–76.

Buffalo Bill's camp in Brooklyn contains thirty acres fenced in. . . . [The interpreter] Changro took us to the tepees of the Indians, already colored richly at their tops like meerchaum pipes, as tepees do, and we saw the Indians at rest hours before the afternoon performance. They may not be Arapahoes and Crows and Shoshones and Blackfeet, and all the rest that the orator in the amphitheatre says they are. I suspect such a mixture would result in continuous bloodshed that would marvellously increase the death rate in Brooklyn. But if they are mainly Sioux, they have the conspicuous merit that belongs to all parts of this show—that of being genuine. They are genuine Indians, and some are so very genuine that the Indian agents were glad to get rid of them as being the malcontents of their bands. It is a queer reflection upon our

management of the red men that for one simple reason ''bad Injuns'' should be willing to leave their homes—the last thing the natural Indian wants to do—and showmen should be glad to take them. That simple reason is that with three good meals a day a bad Indian becomes a good one.

We saw the Indians take one of their square meals. It was served in a building open at one side, like a carriage-shed, and set with long tables between benches. The bucks stalked in with lengthy, noiseless strides—the head men wearing a feather, or more elaborate hair-dresses, and the plain warriors showing only the wrinkled faces and black tresses that render them so like women that one must sometimes look at the foot-coverings to determine an Indian's sex. The fat squaws rolled along, and the pappooses came as children of any sort would, rolling their plump faces around, and even walking backward so as to see something in the background without losing a minute of dinner-time. I saw two of the pappooses—little boys—after dinner, squatted on their heels and smoking cigarettes, with their faces painted and streaked with the artistic taste of a Chinese devil. A boy in a Spanish suit of yellow silk and black velvet was talking to them, and they were grunting back to him just as a pig does when he is eye-deep in mud and you scratch his back to make him still more happy.

At dinner the Indians edged along on the benches and turned up their granite-ware cups to have them filled with coffee by a white youth who looked quite as tough as they did—precisely the sort of youth whom I heard say to an Englishman in a hotel in Calgary, Canada: ''Yer don't like the coffee, eh? Well, that's what yer git, just the same.'' With that mixture of pride and dignity which is a rich portion of the plains Indian, the bucks at the end of the table crooked their elbows under their blankets and pushed them over the table so that I should not watch them as they ate. Then they looked like potato-sacks feeding themselves with spoons that went in and out of the pucker-holes at the top, and as that was not interesting, I withdrew. I saw them all, later on, assembled for a dance, and never, even in Indian camps out West, have I seen a more gaudy, brilliant, and bewildering spectacle than they then presented. For clothing they wore only breech-clouts and moccasins, but for ornaments they had full suits of yellow and blue and green paint, and many pounds of feathers, fur tails, elk teeth, pocket-mirrors, buckskin fringe, bone breastplates, beribboned lances, fringed and feathered *coup* sticks, bits of beadwork, bear claws, and all the rest that makes a soulless idiot liken the Indians to rag-bags, but which appeals to a sense of the romantic and the picturesque as no other costume in the world begins to do. We hired one of the shapeliest of the bucks to pose for Mr. Remington. We started to walk with him to the stables, but without effort he strode ahead, leaving us as if we were tied to the ground.

''He's walking like an Indian,'' said I.

''He walk lazy,'' said Changro.

The buck went to where the 450 ponies and horses are kept, and taking a halter with him, put it over the nose of a pony and led the beast into the open, where he mounted him. Leading the pony was like leading a fraction of an exploding boiler, and

mounting him was like straddling a loose barrel on a ship's deck in a storm. The buck had on all his toggery, and after that was sketched he was bidden to undress and be pictured in his skin. This buck was as modest as all the plains Indians with whom I have dealt. He looked around for a place to undress in, apart from us, and found no other than a theatrical cabin made on the plan of a bird-cage. In a corner of this, in plain sight, he squatted to remove his upper coverings. Then he stood up to take off his ''chaps'' or trousers. When he came out he still kept his blanket around him. When told to take that off, he mounted his pony and coiled the blanket around his waist. At a second bidding he threw that off, and then he was seen to be all-sufficiently clothed—from the Indian stand-point—for he wore his breech-clout, and he was painted like a tropical bird. On the plains, or in the Brooklyn amphitheatre, along with his fellows, a public appearance in the light and airy attire of a ''living picture'' would seem perfectly proper. But to undress before two fully clothed white men in a retired corner hurt either the buck's pride or his modesty—call it which we will.

The inside of a tepee would interest the average visitor to the show, but visitors can with no more reason expect to see the quarters of the braves than they may ask to be shown the dressing-rooms of actors and actresses in a theatre. To see Colonel Cody's tent and then to visit a tepee twenty-five feet away is to be able to compare the quarters of a modern general with the refuge of a Celtic outlaw in the seventeenth century. By just so much have we advanced; by just so much has the Indian stood still. In Buffalo Bill's tent—the size of a small farm-house—we see the space divided into rooms. We see a telephone, curtains, bric-à-brac, carpets, pictures, desks, lounges, easy-chairs, an ornate buffet, a refridgerator, and all the furnishings of a cozy home. In the best tepee we see a circular board floor (it should be of dirt) within a ring of canvas. On a sheet of metal are the smouldering embers of the fire that makes a tepee at once a home and a chimney. Forever seated with their backs to the canvas and their feet to the fire are the Indians, the leader exactly opposite the door flap and the women close beside it, enjoying Indian ''women's rights,'' which are the rights to do everything that a man refuses to do. Rolled up and stuffed around the edges of the tent, in bundles, are the belongings of the family. Like Caesar's ashes, they ''serve to keep the wind away.'' A young brave is painting his bare legs bright yellow with factory-made water-color. A little boy is admiring his painted face in a broken bit of mirror. The adults are sitting, stolidly as if they were stunned, around the circle, and a tender baby propped up against the tent-side is looking even more grave than its parents, reflecting, perhaps, that it wants to cry, but that Indian babies commit the unpardonable sin when they do that, and that they get cuffed and grunted at, which is worse. If any of the Indian men understand any English it is very little, and it has got in their heads precisely as water gets on a cat's feet—against their will. The squaws understand more—for a reason that is not creditable to them. Sometimes a squaw will be seen to grin behind her hand when a white man says something funny or flattering.

Out-of-doors at two or half past two o'clock, just before the first public performance, the space behind the amphitheatre is worth visiting. Scarcely could there have

been such another human hodgepodge in an amphitheatre in ancient Rome. Standing about in groups, or playing for fun the very games and exercises they are hired to show in public, are many sorts of men who are all as nearly like centaurs as men can be. Some are soldiers of France and Russia, Africa and Germany, glittering, gaudy, trim, or, if from Africa, moving about with garments that blow out like balloons as they move in the wind. The Cossacks have the waists of fashionable women, and their long gabardines, each breasted with a row of tiny ivory powder-horns, reach to the middle of dainty, glossy boots. The gauchos of Argentina simply tie up their feet in rudely-dressed cow-skin that leaves their toes bare, and from their loins to their ankles are thin cloths wound about so as to make their very Oriental-looking trousers. The armorer of the show, an English boy who has been an American soldier, shoots eternally at whatever any one will throw up in the air before him. The gauchos just as eternally practise with the bola. Make a pawnbroker's three-ball emblem out of three stones and three lengths of limber rawhide, and you have a bola. All over the grounds they sling this queer implement at posts and poles, scurrying it over the dirt in the hope that it will tangle itself around what they aim at, as it is meant to tangle itself around a cow's legs.

The cowboys, first to mount their ponies, fall to roping one another, until the champion Mexican roper comes along to play with his lariat. Then they admit with unexpected frankness that what he does ''can't be beat; it's out of sight.'' And truly it is. The Mexican—a handsome, finely built fellow, worth all the rest of his band in appearance—can make silent music, or poetry, with his rope. He sends its broad loop curving and circling and lilting round and round, above him, below him, under his feet, and out again over his head, with a motion that is graceful and easy and beautiful beyond the power of words to describe. And whenever he wants to do so, by a mere twist of his wrist he reverses its relation to his hand, and throws it unerringly over and around whatever he wishes to tether with it. When he plays, the cowboys—who are past masters of roping—simply line up their horses and look on, just as the public stares at the same thing a little later in the day. Sergeant Major-r-r Mur-r-r-dock, commanding the Irish Lancers, sits his horse and also looks on like a statue, until he speaks, when he becomes a hero right out of Kipling's army stories. ''Me men all detest me,'' he says; ''but, begorra, they fear me!'' That is a little joke of his, indicative of his strict discipline, which is so terrible that he will not even allow himself a drink of rum until he gets back to Ireland.

When three o'clock draws near, the horse-mounting becomes general, and all over the space behind the scenes are spirited horses resisting the endeavors of Arabs, Indians, soldiers, gauchos, cowboys, and greasers who want to mount them. That is, indeed, a scene for a military painter. Suddenly the band plays in the amphitheatre, and Buffalo Bill takes his place behind a peep-hole in the back scene, mounted on a little covered platform. The dozen troops of rough riders form in parade or squadron formation, awaiting his orders. As the orator in the ring announces each band, Buffalo Bill gives the corresponding order, and each restless company springs as if from the

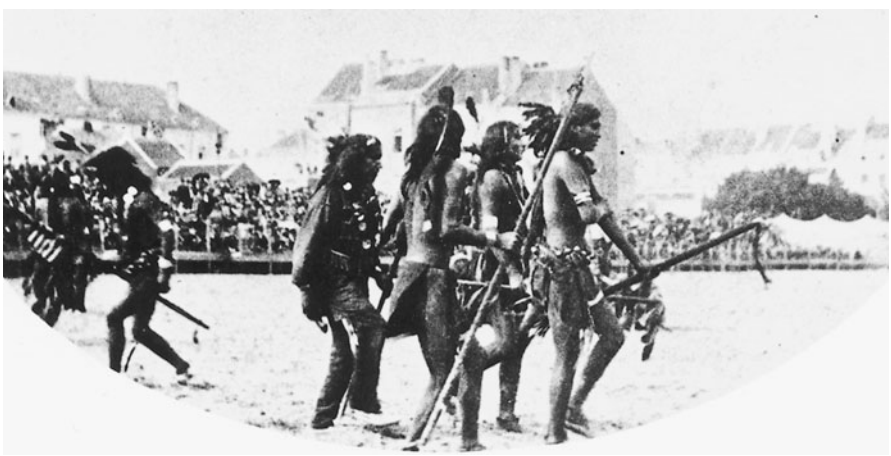
ground into the air, and flies ahead of a cloud of dust into the view of the multitude on the benches.

The Indians attracted much more attention from the press than the cowboys. In 1898 a *Harper's* reporter made another visit to the Indian "encampment," this time to the quarters within New York's premier indoor arena.

Ernest L. Blumenschein, "Behind the Scenes at a 'Wild West' Show," *Harper's Weekly* 42 (April 22, 1898): 422.

Bedouins are whirling and "tumbling," through the sawdust and the sunshine; scene-painters retouching the marvellous blue mountains of the great long curtain; Indians trailing fractious ponies; and Mexicans, blanket on arm, Cossacks, Cubans, and cowboys lazily whiling away the early morning hours in the great arena at the Madison Square Garden. The employees take and scrape the dirt or scatter fresh sawdust, and a group of spectators watch the agile Arabs as they mass on one man's shoulders, or twirl their supple bodies through the air from one end of the ring to the other. Mounting the narrow stairway back of the old stage-coach brings one to quarters one would never imagine existed behind so elegant an exterior. Every square inch of space from floor to ceiling is filled with a chaos of costumes from all ends of the earth. In one corner, surrounded by elegant leather saddles, great heavy hats, velvet jackets trimmed with gold lace, tight-fitting breeches, spurs, harness, pistols, belts, etc., a few lazy Mexicans are visible.

Cowboys, soldiers, and employees are crowded in a large room, many asleep on their cots, and one English chap, propped up with saddles and blankets, trying to recover from a broken leg. Eight or ten Cossacks are partitioned off in a boxlike corner, where they pass most of the day singing their national hymns.



Indians performing dance at Ambrose Park, Brooklyn, 1894. Denver Public Library.

On the stairway, by the window, and occasionally gathering his thoughts by gazing abstractedly into the busy New York street, is a handsome young Indian writing a letter. Looking over his shoulder, I get a glimpse of interest—''New York, Madson Squir Gordin: Ui' nad' nishu' tawa bi' tan' wu—'' (which means, ''I am flying about the earth'') etc.

In writing he uses the English characters. He has evidently finished, for, while chewing the point of his pencil, he gives his letter a final looking over, puts it into the addressed envelope, and turning to me, licks his finger and points to the corner. I have a stamp, which I donate, with an offer to mail the letter. He looks me over carefully, and gradually lets the letter slip from his hand into mine. A glance at the address explains the caution, for it is addressed to ''Miss Alice Lone Bear, Pine Ridge Agency, Kyle P.O., So. Dakota.''

Past the romantic red man, up another flight, and I enter a large room with low ceiling, in which one sees only the thousands of vari-colored feathers attached to war-bonnets, shields, belts, and dresses. An Indian jumps to his feet, and shouting out, causes about twenty strapping young fellows to leap from their blankets under the eaves of the roof and surround me, clamoring and jostling. It is rather a surprising greeting, and I feel my small stature as several ugly-looking bucks push me around. Knowing something of the Indian nature (which strongly resembles the schoolboy's), I shove a big fellow away and back into the rest.

''What's the matter with you, boys?'' I ask.

''One dollar! One dollar!'' is about the only English word in the answer, and repeated with vigor.

I laugh at them, take off my overcoat, open my sketch-book, and look around for a subject. I am soon at work on old Flat Iron, who, propped up in a chair, tries to keep his small eyes open. The young men leave me, to return to their card games, or doze away in their blankets on the floor. A few old men in the room are arranging feathers for a new bonnet, or stringing beads and lead for skirts; the fat and industrious squaws are beading moccasins, or braiding the little girls' hair (which is kept scrupulously clean and neat), while away in one corner an accomplished black-haired youth performs ''Daisy Bell'' on a mouth-organ. Occasionally the young fellows break into an Indian song . . . which is echoed from the floor below by a Russian hymn from the Cossacks. The Indians seem very contented; repartee passes from one side of the room to the other, and a point well made unfailingly brings a laugh.

The card game grows very exciting, attracting to the six squatting figures quite an audience of interested onlookers, who often add to the intenseness by throwing their recent pay into the circle to bet on a ''draw.'' The Indian plays cards with great fervor, drawing the edge of the second card slowly over his first, to get the full benefit of the excitement should fortune fall his way and he have a ''suit.'' If he has high cards, how he does bet! and the lookers on behind him bet. Then with quick breath he takes his next card. An ace of his ''suit.'' Whoop! Hi-y!! those behind him joining in the yelling, to the discomfiture of the apparently stolid losers. And Black Heart goes to stock himself with tobacco for the week.

Twelve-thirty, and all start down for dinner. Old Flat Iron, whom I have been sketching, makes known to me in the sign language that I must bring him some tobacco for his trouble, fumbles around in his buckskin pouch for his dinner check, and dextrously sweeping his dirty blanket around half of him, ambles down the stairs to his place at the long table.

All connected with the show eat in the great room on the ground-floor. Here, in their working-clothes, or in the picturesque attire of their homes (for Cossack, Mexican, Bedouin, and Indian refuse civilized costume), they give the rather commonplace impression of a laboring-class satisfied to work hard for their daily bread.

Dinner over, preparation for the afternoon performance begins at once, and the scenes in the narrow dressing-rooms are animated. With pigments, a good Indian type is made hideous in a short interval, and but for the many deep furrows time has ploughed in the forehead of Flat Iron, one could never tell his yellow-streaked face from that of his son Leaping Antelope. Bodies and limbs are painted half white, half green, or with circles (representing the sun) and crescents and stars, and one Indian leaves the imprint of a vermilion-smeared hand on his cheek. The feathers come off the wall; the many sleigh-bells jingle and tinkle; the boys break into song; the squaws ''ti-ti'' in their high shrill voices; even the dignified old chiefs are gay, arrayed in all their glory. A blast from a bugle starts them off to saddle their ponies, on which they are soon mounted, ready for the grand entry. The cowboy band starts up ''Hail, Columbia,'' the bugle sounds again, the great canvas curtain is drawn, and the howling warriors dash wildly into the public gaze.

The curtain is redrawn—the curtain with the distant blue mountains, the blue pine-trees, and the blue tepees. Before, it is the romance and pleasure; behind, the reality and labor. Both sides are interesting.

Luther Standing Bear acted as interpreter for seventy-five Sioux during the Wild West tour of England in 1898–99. At the age of eleven, he had been taken away from the tribe and boarded for four years at the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. After a short spell in Wanamaker's department store in Philadelphia, he returned as a school teacher and then operated a post office and general store on reservations in South Dakota for more than ten years during the Ghost Dance troubles. In 1898 he traveled to nearby Rushville, Nebraska, where William McCune hired Indians for the Buffalo Bill show. He sold them costumes suitable for the performance and signed on as interpreter. As an acculturated son of a chief, Standing Bear was presumed to have natural authority over the Sioux. He was responsible for enforcing the strict measures to guard against alcohol abuse; he operated a ticket-check system to limit their free movements outside the hotel or camp and withheld half their wages until the end of the tour. After a career as a stage Indian in the shows and early movies punctuated by more mundane storekeeping, he reflected in his autobiography on his first season with the Wild West in England,

nearly thirty years before. Buffalo Bill had been less prejudiced than the cowboys, and very aware that in Europe, the Indians were key attraction on stage and off.

Luther Standing Bear, *My People, the Sioux*, ed. E. A. Brininstool (London: Williams and Norgate, 1928), 252, 254, 260–61, 263, 265–66.

[In London's Olympia Theatre arena] we found our horses—black, white, bay, and buckskin-colored animals . While all the Indians belonged to the Sioux tribe, we were supposed to represent four different tribes, each tribe to ride animals of one color. . . .

Buffalo Bill was well pleased to note how well the Indians minded me in all our work. I was wearing a very fine outfit, and the damp weather of London was not doing it any good. So after we had given a few shows, Johnny Baker came to me one day and said it would be a good plan if I did not wear my best clothes on the days when the attendance was not large, but that on such days I might take the part of a cowboy if I chose. This was a change for me and I enjoyed it very much. . . .

Breakfast would shortly be ready. Our appetites were sharpened by the work we had been doing. In the dining-room was one long table for the Indians, with other tables for the various other nationalities represented in the show. We always had plenty to eat, so there was no complaint in that direction.

One morning as I came into the dining-tent I noticed that everybody but the Indians had been served with hot cakes. This did not bother me very much, as Indians do not eat such food. At dinner-time that same day, when I sat down to our table, I saw to my surprise that there were pancakes before us. These were the ''left-overs'' from the morning, and now the cook wanted to feed them to us. Although I was very angry, I made no remark, but quietly left the table and went over where Buffalo Bill and the head officials of the show were eating dinner.

Colonel Cody asked, ''What is it, Standing Bear?'' ''Colonel Cody,'' I replied, ''this morning all the other races represented in the show were served with pancakes, but the Indians were not given any. We do not object to that, as we do not care for them; but now the cook has put his old cold pancakes on our table and expects us to eat what was left over from breakfast, and it isn't right.'' ''Buffalo Bill's eyes snapped,'' as he arose from the table. ''Come with me, Standing Bear,'' he exclaimed. We went direct to the manager of the dining-room, and Colonel Cody said to him, ''Look here, sir, you are trying to feed my Indians the left-over pancakes from the morning meal. I want you to understand, sir, that I will not stand for such treatment. My Indians are the principal feature of this show, and they are the one people I will not allow to be misused or neglected. Hereafter see to it that they get just exactly what they want at meal-time. Do you understand me, sir?''

''Yes, sir, oh, yes, sir,'' exclaimed the embarrassed manager. After that we had no more trouble about our meals. . . .

There were a great many cowboys with the show. There was a chief of the cowboys who had general supervision over both horses and men. When an unbroken

horse would be brought in, this cowboy chief would give it to an Indian to ride bareback. After the animal was well broken, it would be taken away from the Indian and given to a cowboy to ride. Then the Indian would be given another unbroken horse. For quite a while we said nothing about it, but finally it began to be just a little too much to stand. One day one of the Indians came to me just before it was time to enter the arena. His horse was saddled and bridled but he was leading the animal by the bridle. I asked him what was the matter, and he said it was a wild horse and he was not going to ride it into the arena.

I went to the chief cowboy and said, ''I do not think you are doing right. You know our Indian boys have to ride bareback, but you always give them the wild horses to ride. Then, when they have the horse nicely broken, you give it to a cowboy. Why don't you give the wild horses to the cowboys to break in? They ride on saddles, and it would not be so hard for them.''

But the chief cowboy said, ''Well, I can't be bothered by a little thing like that. You will have to see Buffalo Bill about the horses.''

But I retorted, ''You know very well that Buffalo Bill does not know what you do with the horses. He does not know that you give the wild ones to the Indian boys to ride until they are broken in. Give that horse back to that Indian boy or he will not go into the arena today.''

That was all—but the boy got his horse in time to enter the arena with the others. Just as I was ready to go back to the Indians, I looked at Buffalo Bill. and he had a twinkle in his eye. After that, we had no more trouble with the horses. Although Buffalo Bill never said anything to me, I knew he had fixed things to our satisfaction. . . .

While we were showing in Birmingham, a little daughter was born to us. The morning papers discussed the event in big headlines that the first full-blooded Indian baby had been born at the Buffalo Bill show grounds. Colonel Cody was to be its godfather and the baby was to be named after the reigning Queen of England. The child's full name was to be Alexandra Birmingham Cody Standing Bear.

The next morning Colonel Cody came to me and asked if baby could be placed in the side-show. He said the English people would like to see the face of a newly born Indian baby lying in an Indian cradle or ''hoksicala postan.'' I gave my consent, and the afternoon papers stated that the baby and mother could be seen the following afternoon.

Long before it was time for the show to begin, people were lining up in the road. My wife sat on a raised platform, the little one in the cradle before her. The people filed past, many of them dropping money in a box for her. Nearly every one had some sort of little gift for her also. It was a great drawing card for the show; the work was very light for my wife, and as for the baby, before she was twenty-four hours old she was making more money than my wife and I together.

With the coming of the new baby came added cares, of course. Our little boy, who was named after me (Luther), had to be rigged up for the part he took in the show. He

had a full costume of buckskin, very much like the one I wore, and every day his face must be painted and his hair braided for the two performances. The Indian boys seemed to think it was a pleasure to get the little chap ready for the exhibition. After he was "all fixed up," he would stand outside the tipi, and the English-speaking people would crowd around to shake his hand and give him money. This he would put in a little pocket in his buck-skin jacket, and when it was full he would refuse to accept any more, although the crowd would try to force it on him. Then he would leave, in apparent disgust, and come inside the tipi. He kept us all laughing.

As Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Thomas Jefferson Morgan objected strongly to the participation of Indians in Wild West shows. John H. Oberly, his predecessor, had also complained that traveling with the shows and immoral showmen "is not only most demoralizing to the present and future welfare of the Indian, but it creates a roaming and unsettled disposition." "The show business," the reformist Indian Rights Association stated in 1899, "teaches the Indian that what the white man really wants of him is amusement furnished by exhibitions of picturesque barbarism; not the acquisition of those sober, unpicturesque but absolutely necessary qualities which alone can make him equal to the battle of life."[5] Morgan's annual report to secretary of the Interior John W. Noble articulated his deep concerns. In practice, to prevent an Indian from exercising his right to leave the reservation if he chose was difficult to enforce, but the Bureau and reformers complained that the shows hampered the policy of individual landholding and assimilation that the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 had begun.

Report of September 5, 1890, in *House Executive Document*, no.1, pt. 5, vol. 2, 51 Congress, 2d session, serial 2841, lvii–lix, in *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by "Friends of the Indian," 1880–1900*, ed. Francis Paul Prucha (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 309–12.

The practice which has prevailed for many years of occasionally permitting Indians to travel with "Wild West" and similar shows throughout the country and abroad, for the purpose of giving exhibitions of frontier life and savage customs, has been very harmful in its results. I have from the beginning steadily refused to sanction any permits, and I heartily welcome your letter dated August 4, 1890, directing that no more be granted.

In all cases where these engagements have been authorized their employers have been required to enter into written contracts with the Indians, obligating themselves to pay them fair, stipulated salaries for their services, to supply them with proper food and raiment, to meet their traveling and needful incidental expenses, including medical attendance, etc. to protect them from immoral influences and surroundings, and to employ a white man of good character to look after their welfare, etc. They have also been required to execute bonds with good and sufficient se-

curities, payable to the Secretary of the Interior, conditioned upon the faithful fulfillment of their contracts.

While these contracts have been complied with in some instances, in others well-grounded complaints have been made of the abandonment of the Indians and the failure of their employers to pay them their salaries. These complaints will be investigated and steps will be taken to recover the amounts due by instituting suit on the bonds given by the employers.

November 1, 1889, I addressed a circular letter to the agents of agencies from which the Indians have been taken for exhibition purposes, calling for the fullest information upon the subject, with a view to suggesting such modifications in the policy of the Department as the facts might warrant. The replies of the agents fully confirmed my previous impressions that the practice is a most pernicious one, fraught with dangerous results, economically, physically, and morally. It is not only injurious to the Indians who engage in the business, but also to those who remain at home, who, from their peculiar status and isolation, are influenced in a large degree by those who have been absent on such enterprises.

The policy of granting permission for Indians to engage in shows of this character has doubtless rested upon the idea that in addition to readily earning money, they would, by extensive travel through the States, and possibly in Europe, become familiar with the manners and customs of civilized life. But travel is not necessarily elevating or profitable. While they may earn a little money and see something of civilized life, their employment is, from the very nature of the case, temporary, and they are frequently brought into association with some of the worst elements of society. Their representations of feats of savage daring, showing border life as it formerly existed, vividly depicting scenes of rapine, murder, and robbery, for which they are enthusiastically applauded, is demoralizing in an extreme degree. They become self-important and strongly imbued with the idea that the deeds of blood, etc., which they portray in their most realistic aspects, are especially pleasing to the white people, whom they have been taught to regard as examples of civilization.

Their surroundings in these tours are generally of the worst, and they pick up most degrading vices. Instead of being favorably impressed with the religion of the white man, it is more than likely that they come to distrust it through what they unavoidably see, hear, and experience. Traveling about the country on these expeditions fosters the roving spirit already so common among them, encourages idleness and a distaste for steady occupation, and during their absence their families often suffer for want of their care and assistance. They frequently return home bankrupt in purse, wrecked morally and physically, and, in such cases, their influence and example among the other Indians is the worst possible.

The influence of these shows is antagonistic to that of the schools. The schools elevate, the shows degrade. The schools teach industry and thrift, the shows encourage idleness and waste. The schools inculcate morality, the shows lead almost inevitably to vice. The schools encourage Indians to abandon their paint, blankets, feathers,

and savage customs, while the retention and exhibition of these is the chief attraction of the shows. Owing to the steady growth of public opinion with reference to the possibility of civilizing the Indians through the education of their children, Congress appropriated this year nearly $2,000,000 for Indian education. The popular impression of the Indians obtained from Wild West Show exhibits is that they are incapable of civilization, and this impression works directly and powerfully against the Government in its benevolent work.

I have endeavored through the various agents to impress upon the minds of the Indians the evil resulting from connecting themselves with such shows and the importance of their remaining at home and devoting their time and energies to building houses, establishing permanent homes, cultivating farms, and acquiring thrifty, industrious habits, thus placing themselves in fit position for absorption into our political and civil life.

Chauncey Yellow Robe, a Sioux Indian from Rapid City, South Dakota, spoke before the Fourth Annual Convention of the Society of American Indians in October 1914. The society was a pan-Indian association founded in 1911, and led by acculturated mixed-bloods, often Sioux. His main complaint was the "evil and degrading influence of commercializing the Indian," and the U.S. government's abdication of responsibility.

Chauncey Yellow Robe, "The Menace of the Wild West Show," *Quarterly Journal of the Society of American Indians* 2 (July–September 1914): 224–25.

It is now more than four centuries ago since Columbus came to our shores and claimed the country and gave us the name of Indians, and at the same time inaugurated the first Indian show by importing some of the Indians across the water for exhibition before the Spanish throne, and to-day the practice continues to exist in the wild-west shows.

Some time ago, Judge Sells, the United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs, said, "Let us save the American Indian from the curse of whiskey." I believe these words hold the key to the Indian problem to-day, but how can we save the American Indian if the Indian Bureau is permitting special privileges in favor of the wild-west shows, moving-picture concerns, and fair associations for commercializing the Indian? This is the greatest hindrance, injustice, and detriment to the present progress of the American Indians toward civilization. The Indian should be protected from the curse of the wild-west show schemes, wherein the Indians have been led to the white man's poison cup and have become drunkards.

In some of the celebrations, conventions, and county fairs in Rapid City and other reservation border towns, in order to make the attraction a success, they think they cannot do without wild-west shows, consequently certain citizens have the Indian show craze. In fact, South Dakota State Fairs have largely consisted of these shows. We can see from this state of affairs that the white man is persistently perpetuating

the tribal habits and customs. We see that the showman is manufacturing the Indian plays intended to amuse and instruct young children, and is teaching them that the Indian is only a savage being. We hear now and then of a boy or girl who is hurt or killed by playing savage. These are the direct consequences of the wild-west Indian shows and moving pictures that depict lawlessness and hatred. . . .

I am not speaking here from selfish and sensitive motives, but from my own point of view, for cleaner civilization, education, and citizenship for my race. . . . "To the American Indian let there be given equal opportunities, equal responsibilities, equal education."

SUMMER AMUSEMENT PARKS

By the mid-nineteenth century, as metropolitan city populations doubled in a generation, the psychological, social, and physical costs of congestion became apparent. Greater New York was the extreme case; its population increased twofold between 1850 and 1870, and again by 1900, reaching a total of more than four and three-quarter million by 1910. Urbanism seemed a mixed blessing. The great city was progressive and civilized but seemed artificial and impersonal without familiar rural surroundings as a counterpoise. There were various opportunities for relaxation and relief. In the landscaped "rural oases" of Central Park and Prospect Park, created in the 1850s and 1860s, New York's and Brooklyn's weary found recuperation in informal walks close to "greensward" and on the promenades, where music from bandstands soothed shattered nerves. Suburban picnic sites near scenic falls or on the banks of gently flowing rivers were equally popular. Sea-bathing had few advocates but picturesque views from beaches on the Jersey shore and on the islands close to Manhattan gave solace from Bowery hustle. However, even in the 1830s these seaside havens were never simply "rural retreats" for the contemplation of pastoral scenery. At Hoboken, on the other side of the Hudson River, the attractions at the Elysian Fields belied its name. From April to October, steamships carried passengers on scheduled trips to Hoboken's games pitches and racetracks, and vendors tempted visitors with pleasures of every kind. The era of popular summer resorts had begun.

All major cities in the western world saw similar developments. Smart residential hotels in Brighton offered vacationing middle classes the sophisticated entertainments of London in the more relaxed setting of a seaside location. More disturbing to genteel observers were the numerous tawdry funfairs that mushroomed near the seashore. London's Margate or Manchester's Blackpool had iron "pleasure piers" where cheap attractions lured the poor on day-trips from the metropolis. Americans were as eager to develop low-cost, funfair amusements; by the 1890s the largest seaside resorts rivaled the English in size and scale and in the lavish use of electricity and iron. And

none was more celebrated as the exemplar of unashamed, exuberant pleasure-seeking than Coney Island, a dozen miles from New York City.

In the 1850s Coney Island was merely one of many picnic and bathing areas on Long Island. Around its five-mile stretch of sandy beaches sprouted an unplanned constellation of small and often disreputable beer gardens, dance halls, eating places, and sports arenas. Far greater capital investment followed construction of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1882 and the opening of new steamship and railroad routes. In the late 1870s the Prospect Park and Coney Island Railroad offered speedy transportation from Brooklyn for thirty-five cents. The muddy creek was drained, allowing easy access from the mainland. Coney Island became a fashionable resort. Three grand racetracks were opened. At Brighton Beach and Manhattan Beach to the east, magnificent hotels were built for middle-class families on vacation and day-trippers from New York and Philadelphia. Speculative developers at West Brighton a few miles away began constructing the untidy complex of cheap amusement concessions that formed the nucleus of the enclosed parks in the early twentieth century.

By the 1890s Coney Island was thoroughly commercialized. Even more than Atlantic City, it had a reputation for flamboyant showmanship, for mechanical amusements, and for the use of artificial light. Fifty thousand visitors gathered there on a summer Saturday evening in the early 1880s. A guidebook on summer excursions close to Philadelphia depicted the glare of Coney Island hotels and beaches: "As night comes the bright suns of the electric light blaze out to illuminate the pier, and myriads of light are seen along the shore, while to the eastward fireworks go up."[1] An Island resort complex sponsored one of the first electric signs of the 1890s, fifteen hundred multicolored bulbs on a board fifty feet high and eighteen feet wide, in Times Square:

SWEPT BY OCEAN BREEZES
THE GREAT HOTELS
PAIN'S FIREWORKS
SOUSA'S BAND
SEIDL'S GREAT ORCHESTRA
THE RACES
NOW—MANHATTAN BEACH—NOW[2]

Between 1895 and 1904 entrepreneurs grouped together familiar attractions within several amusement park complexes along Surf Avenue. Enclosure was the most novel development. Earlier sporting entrepreneurs had set the precedent. Circuses had fenced temporary amphitheaters and charged admission; from the early 1860s baseball magnates had enclosed sports grounds and built stands for spectators to games of professional players from neighboring cities. In 1895 Captain Paul Boynton, a renowned diver and

swimmer, opened Sea Lion Park, Coney's first walled mini-city of fun. Its centerpiece was a water slide, Shoot-the-Chutes, which sent its passengers hurtling into the lagoon where forty trained sea lions amused spectators. Two years later George Tilyou built Steeplechase Park and packed its fifteen acres with an astonishing variety of entertainments.

The inspiration for Sea Lion and Steeplechase Parks was the Midway Plaisance at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Like other world's fairs organized after London's Great Exhibition of 1851, Chicago's combined entertainment and education. Separated from the more austere classical buildings of the White City was the Midway strip, a mile long and two hundred yards wide. Ranged along the Midway were amusement concessions, most notably the giant ferris wheel, and a galaxy of villages of "native" people demonstrating the unique customs of Sudan or Samoa. Visitors rode on camels at the Streets of Cairo and watched exotic hootchy-cootchy dancers in the Persian Palace of Eros. The juxtaposition of anthropological oddities in architectural fantasylands, of technological thrills and traditional fairground attractions, became the characteristic feature of the larger suburban summer parks.

Frederic Thompson and Elmer Dundy raised the amusement park to new grandeur in 1903, when they opened Luna Park on the old Sea Lion site. In 1901 Tilyou had brought to Steeplechase the cosmorama-fantasy A Trip to the Moon, managed by Thompson and Dundy, that had proved so popular at the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo the year before. At Luna Park, Thompson made good use of his brief draftsman's training and his experience of a dozen exposition midways to devise a bold architectural fancy. He retained Sea Lion's lagoon and the chutes, and around them constructed a dreamworld of a thousand lath-and-plaster minarets and towers. The fifteen-acre Dreamland park followed in 1904, more classical in form (and more expensive, with construction costs of three and a half million dollars), with even more spectacular lighting. Well over a million people, from a total population of four million in greater New York in 1905, flocked to the island on a summer weekend. "Coney is an empire among its kind," Reginald Wright Kauffman claimed, "a great American industry" for "a carnival all summer long."[3]

The Coney Island parks became models for similar enterprises throughout the United States and beyond. Luna Park attracted unprecedented publicity in newspapers and magazines, but intellectual property rights were impossible to protect. Scores of copies of the Luna name and design, and even the tell-tale crescent symbol, soon appeared in America's largest cities, and in London, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, and Melbourne. The most enterprising of the speculators, the Ingersoll Construction Company, built two of the most successful Luna Parks in Cleveland and Pittsburgh in 1905. The more austere and formal Dreamland spawned fewer White City clones. But everywhere, the old summer parks founded by street railway companies at lakeside picnic

grounds and trolley intersections in the last decades of the nineteenth century were modernized and upgraded in imitation of Coney. Landscaped grounds, croquet lawns, and sportsfields were sacrificed, and small fairground rides replaced by dance-halls, nickelodeons, roller coasters, freak-show "aborigines," and scaled-down disaster epics. The Coneyized trolley parks used superfluous electric light to broadcast their attractions to the city patrons of their streetcar lines.

Many middle-class commentators were shocked by the uninhibited pleasure-seeking in the old funfairs and in the "new" parks. On summer weekends visitors from the most densely inhabited city on earth paid twenty cents, a dime, or even a nickel for the journey of forty minutes or more from Manhattan. Then, as soon as they left the pier or rail station and entered the small enclosed parks—never more than five city blocks square—they were packed together in a swirling tide of humanity. In O. Henry's story, "Brickdust Row," the wealthy Blinker arrives at Coney by ship and is at first startled by being jostled and hustled along by the mob "shrieking, struggling, hurrying, panting, hurling itself in incontinent frenzy, with unabashed abandon, into the ridiculous sham palaces of trumpery and tinsel pleasures" in "Fairyland."[4] Carnival surroundings encouraged merry-making. Jollity became frivolity. The screams of delight of underdressed youth cavorting on shore and sea by day added to the general hubbub enveloping the joyrides on the Bowery and Surf Avenue by night.

In a 1911 pamphlet sponsored by the amusement park industry, Irvin S. Cobb attempted to define "The Spirit of Coney." New Yorkers, he explained, were accustomed to crowds, to banter and ballyhoo. On a Saturday evening the brief journey by boat or train released them from office and factory, kitchen and nursery. At dusk on Surf Avenue, the "vast geyser of sound" from the "painted city" and the brash ticket-sellers gave even the most miserable and lonely "the tincture of broad tolerance, of genial responsibility, of what-do-I-care-ativeness, that . . . glows and radiates . . . human fellowship and good nature." The journalist Rollin Lynde Hartt also believed that city-dwellers sought a "counter-irritant" as a cure for "Manhattanitis." Relief and restoration came not, as the genteel fondly hoped throughout the nineteenth century, in pastoral bliss and tranquil contemplation of the seashore. It was in sights and sounds of "wild hilarity" that the patrons of Thompson's and Tilyou's summer parks found brief respite. Night added disguise and the alluring glow of a million lights. To escape Babylon, the day-trippers added Babel.[5]

Journalists and the "New" Coney

Journalist Julian Ralph went to Coney Island during the heyday of the grand hotels: the Manhattan Beach, the Brighton Beach, and the Oriental. Coney was already, he announced in 1896, "the pioneer with modern improvements

for giving the crowds a good time; it remains *sui generis*, enthroned, the king of all the popular resorts." What impressed him most were class differences within the "popular" market. There were essentially two very distinct Coney Islands at play. Affluent visitors near hotels to the east differed radically in their tastes from the less well-off day-trippers at the "hurly-burly" attractions clustered around the extravagantly exotic Elephant Hotel and the Bowery at West Brighton. For to the west was the dynamic commercial development: the three hundred-foot iron tower from the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, LaMarcus Thompson's novel "Switchback Railway," and Charles Feltman's Ocean Pavilion, with room for three thousand dancers and a restaurant seating eight thousand. Real-estate speculators Peter and George Tilyou were developing the Bowery abutting Surf Avenue; soon it rivaled Manhattan's notorious district, with carnival sideshows, penny arcades, fortune tellers, variety music-halls, shooting galleries, boxing booths, and scores of taverns.

Ralph observed that although few swam in the sea, the beach provided the essential setting of social freedom.

Julian Ralph, "Coney Island," *Scribner's Magazine* 20 (July 1896): 14–20.

[W]hether it was that the water was chilly, or whether it was due to the unpleasantness of soaking one's apparel with brine and sand, it was a fact that few of us went into the billows for more than a ceremonious plunge. Instead, we lolled in the sun upon the hot, dry sand, and chatted with the girls and women and embanked their limbs in grave-like hillocks the while we anticipated in our chatter the delights of the music and the dinner that were to come. I noticed, too, a very strange fact strongly indicative of a popular sharing of my own pessimistic opinion of surf-bathing, and that was the general habit of smoking in bath uniform on the part of the men. Nearly all of them had brought cigars or cigarettes out of their dressing-rooms to enjoy as they lounged on the sand. . . . I came away with the new idea that what brought my neighbors into that bath enclosure was the barbarous but natural desire to free themselves from the fetters of prim modern dress and revel, loose and free, in the sunshine and the sand.

After the bath there was a choice of concerts. One was by Seidl's orchestra straining to be popular, and the other was by Sousa's band straining to be classical. . . . At night, the concerts compete with a grand fireworks exhibition—a London diversion, the like of which we never saw anywhere else but here, and still believe to be as splendid and dazzling a sight as the hand of man can create.

These were the novelties and triumphs for whose delights we owe gratitude to Coney Island. It will be noticed that they confine their territory to the newer or east end of the island, for it is a fact that the house in the shape of an elephant and, possibly, the iron steamboats and the old iron pier into the ocean were the only innovations that the older or western half of the resort brought forward. . . . For a transplanted Old World fair is what the older portion of Coney Island suggests—the

amusement annex of such a fair at least; and on a scale so large as to make the hodge-podge seem a novelty. The principal avenue through it is a well called ''the Bowery,'' a title which is at once amply and minutely descriptive to the born New Yorker, who has all his life called that which is cheap and yet pretentious, that which is loud, that which is beer-sodden, and that which is ''faked'' or made-up or make-believe—all by the comprehensive term ''Bowery.'' There is not a thing (except the fireworks), on the higher-priced end of the island that cannot be obtained or witnessed at the cheaper end, but there are scores of attractions at the hurly-burly end that the more exclusive region does not hold forth. The peculiar theory of some religionists that we shall have differing heavens, to conform to our mundane ideas and tastes, gets some confirmation from the fact that ten go to the Bowery where one frequents the better beaches. Most excursionists who set apart a day for Coney Island put aside a generous sum to spend there—to ''throw away'' as we say. The resolution is eloquently expressed in the manners of the men, whether they are rotund old fellows in fine cloth ordering the ''best'' for their exquisite wives at Manhattan Beach, or wide-eyed mechanics clutching the arms of pallid sweethearts and pushing them through the perspiring mob around the elephant. And some, near the elephant, have set aside money sufficient for a day within sound of Seidl's orchestra, yet they prefer the oom-pah bands of rusted brass. They would rather have a luncheon of Frankfurters and lager and a dinner of roasted clams and melted butter, than the finicky food and precise surroundings away from the hurly-burly where nostalgia eats up appetite. And the queer thing is, that each sort of persons makes his cast-iron, habitual choice and calls it ''seeing life;'' whereas if the masses sent a deputation to Brighton and Manhattan and a few spent an occasional day in the Bowery, they would really see life and learn a great deal, and alas! be more or less unhappy. . . .

[W]estern Coney Island . . . is the most bewildering, noisy approach to bedlam that we know in America . . . [,] still the seat of a delirium of raw pleasure. Physically, the place is a sort of Chinatown of little frame buildings set about, helter-skelter, like a cityful of houses in a panic. Aurally, it is a riot of the noises of roller-coasters, from two to six stories high; of test-your-lungs and test-your-strength and test-your-grip machines; of shooting-galleries and ''see-if-you-can-hit-the-nigger's head'' contrivances; of those strange merry-go-rounds which seem to be manufactured exclusively in New Utrecht, L. I., of animals designed by a baker of ginger-bread; of razzle-dazzle rings that go all ways at once, like a ship's compass; of a band of howling Sioux; of the yells of the shouters in front of the freak museums; of rocking-boat devices that would make Neptune seasick if he rode in them; of the ''ring-the-cane-and-get-a-cigar'' layouts; of hand-organs, of yelling sea-bathers; in short, of pandemonium.

I like to go there, once in a while, to see the iron steamboats and the steam and trolley cars fling their loads of the poorer city folk upon the sands, complacent and at ease, beside the nervous, uncertain country people who come, a thousand at a time, upon the regular excursion boats. What Barney and Julia, from the tenements, go to ''the Bowery'' for I do not know, unless it is to enjoy the triumph of their own sagacity

in not ever, by any chance, being victimized by the fakirs who prey upon the unsophisticated. Barney looks on, from the outside, at all the clumsy traps for the unwary, and loves to guy the touts, who stand without, coaxing the people in.

''Say, cully,'' he says when he catches the eye of the roper-in, ''is de fish bitin' good today?''

And Julia says of him proudly, to the other girls in the tenement at home: ''Dere was a man tried to git Barney to take a chance on a watch, but Barney don't buy gold bricks an' he never blows out de gas.''

What Barney and Julia like at Coney island is the bathing in the afternoon when Barney ''berhaves terrible—'' by endeavoring to duck his sweetheart; wherefore he chases her, screaming, all through the crowds—and the dancing. There are what are called dancing pavilions at the western end, where the music scarcely pauses between seven o'clock and that hour which is invariably called ''de las' boat.'' . . . The city boys and girls described their own fashion of dancing when they gave the name of ''pivoters'' to the thousands of girls who are seized with such a madness for dancing that they spend every night in the dance halls and the picnic parks. Julia stands erect, with her body as rigid as a poker and with her left arm straight out from her shoulder like an upraised pump-handle. Barney slouches up to her, and bends his back so that he can put his chin on one of her shoulders and she can do the same by him. Then, instead of dancing with a free, lissome, graceful, gliding step, they pivot or spin, around and around, within the smallest circle that can be drawn around them. The expression on Barney's face is usually that of grim, determined effort, like that of one who is taking part in a trial of endurance; but Julia's eyes are uplifted, like those of a maid in her devotions, and a settled, almost sanctified calm is upon her features. On the last boat a great crowd of these honest young people is apt to gather on the upper deck, aft, where the young men practise that repartee which is quite as sharp and vastly more kindly than the wit of the London street folk. . . .

This glance at all parts of Coney Island shows us that while it has some of the main features of the great watering-places of Europe, it is yet different from all of them in being purely and wholly an excursion resort. . . . What is peculiar to Coney Island is that no one lives there. Other resorts offer change and rest, but Coney Island offers only change. A reporter having to announce the formal opening of one of the beaches there, put the case of Coney Island in a verbal nutshell in this brief sentence, one day: ''Manhattan Beach has opened, and now New Yorkers have a place by the seaside where they may go for dinner, spend an evening enjoyably, and get home at a reasonable time.'' . . . How grand an acquisition it is for us to possess a beach to which we can go in an hour at the cost of a quarter of a dollar, to get a new environment and have old ocean's pure tonic breath blow the cobwebs out of our brain—and then, as the chronicler saith, ''get home at a reasonable time.''

In 1903 Frederic Thompson mounted a very successful advertising campaign to persuade press and public that his park-enclave was "new," a "renais-

sance," cleaner, brighter, and free from the crime and corruption that had tainted the island. It was, he proclaimed, the "electric city by the sea." "By day a paradise . . . At night, Arcadia!" "Harnessed Lightning in Flashing Fountains!"[6] A quarter of a million lights gave the free-form scramble of orange crescents, gold dragons, and oriental glitter some thematic unity. Entertainments were jumbled together: elephants and Eskimos, the Canals of Venice and the Japanese tea garden, the disaster epic "Fire and Flames" and the Durbar of India, a three-ring circus suspended over the lagoon, the old-fashioned Helter-Skelter, and the ultramodern Premature Baby Incubators.

Journalist Winthrop Alexander responded to the media event. What distinguished Luna Park, he thought, were the picturesque illusions. Such simulated "journeys" to exotic locations far in place, space, and time had been one of the most popular features of world's fair midways in the 1890s. Now, there were novel futuristic "voyages" for those who could not afford to travel abroad. Popular science-fiction novels like H. G. Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) or Jules Verne's fantasies seemed to be made real. It soon became legend. A few years later, in O. Henry's short-story "The Lickpenny Lover," Maisie, the beautiful but worldy-wise salesgirl, mistakes millionaire Irving Carter's genuine offer to show her the real gondolas of Venice for the usual ploy of a cheap daytrip to dreamland. For Alexander, this "wonder-world" was Coney's hallmark.

Winthrop Alexander, "Coney Island's New Wonder-World," *New Metropolitan Magazine* 18 (1903): 311–19.

Summer brings many hours of leisure to the millions of people dwelling in this big city of New York. It is the season when, as at no other time of the year, they seek to amuse themselves; or, to put it more correctly, when they seek to be amused; and they accomplish this by a variety of means which is truly multi-form. The avidity of their quest for opportunity to extract all the sunshine possible from the golden hours is such an incentive to invention and enterprise that every season is an occasion for new wonder at the ingenuity manifested and the amount of capital expended in adding to the attractiveness of popular resorts, and in the new ones which will appeal to the love of novelty.

Coney Island has been for years the great focussing point for New Yorkers, and for visitors to the metropolis, led thither by the desire and the intention to make the fullest and the lightest use of a summer day or evening. . . .

In the meantime, a practical work of reformation has been inaugurated by a class of men interested in amusement enterprises, who have discovered by their own successes that the competition of clean and well-ordered places of entertainment presenting meritorious and interesting attractions is overshadowing the business and undermining the influence of such cheap, meretricious and questionable shows as have prospered here in the past. One of the results of what these men, who are

actually reformers without making any profession in that direction, is that Coney Island is developing a new and better character, attracts a growing proportion of the respectable elements in metropolitan life, and is freeing itself from the domination of the coarser elements in the creation of the local color and atmosphere. A fresh and impressive evidence of the solidity of this reformation has been presented in the inauguration this summer of a single amusement enterprise which represents an investment of something more than one million dollars, and which, strange as the fact may appear, derives none of its support from the sale of liquor nor from spectacles wherein the woman performer of the so-called soubrette type is a feature.

In various ways, Luna Park, the new attraction to which reference is here made, is entitled to more than ordinary notice, inasmuch as it represents upon an extensive scale the marked improvement in the estimate placed by promoters of amusement enterprises upon the tone and taste of the average pleasure-seeker. Occupying an area of twenty-two acres, it is a wonder of architectural splendor and artistic landscape effects. There are touches of the incongruous and the grotesque, it must be admitted, but these are not obtrusive. The general effect is a realization of what imagination might paint as a fairy city, and the visitor is bewildered by the beautiful picture presented on every hand. It is as fascinating in its details as in its *ensemble*. Perhaps those features in the architectural and landscape effects which are most likely to excite and maintain interest are those representative of other lands than our own, and of wonderful regions in our own country with which the majority of people are acquainted only through what they have learned from story and picture. The visitor experiences no difficulty in recognizing the Venetian canal, with its little bridges and the ornate palace rising above foundations laved by the sluggish waters. In fact, the first impressions received of the place as a whole are suggestive of what one knows or has read of the "Queen of the Adriatic," although every path leading from the Court of Honor, with its picturesque lagoon and encircling sky-line of towers, domes and minarets takes the visitor into other portions of the world—here an old German village, with its Rath Haus, or convention hall; there a typical Irish village nestling under the walls of Blarney castle; in another place an Alpine mill and torrent; then a quaint Japanese village; elsewhere the early Californian mining camp, the Southern darkey in the field as he was before the war, the Filipinos in their home, and so on till one has passed from the artistic evidences of refined civilization to the rugged picturesqueness of nature in such regions as the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, the Yosemite Falls and Yellowstone Park. There is life to add to the interest of every scene; and the large permanent population of this wonderful summer city, which represents so fully the whole world in miniature—the multitude whose homes and employment for the summer are here—is literally a congress of nations.

Even though seen only as a massing of spectacular effects, Luna Park is worth a visit; and much time can be spent in an agreeable manner without patronizing any of the several exhibitions which are to be seen in some of the larger buildings among the many on the grounds. Day and night the grounds alone present a mammoth display of



Luna Park at night, 1904. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

ingenuity and art. Then there is an almost limitless possibility of amusement in seeing how others amuse themselves. Evening scenes are, of course, especially fascinating because of the liberal use made of electric-lighting effects, the brilliant display centering at the tower which rises from the lagoon, near its head or broadest part, to a height of about two hundred feet. There is a triteness in the expression about turning night into day which emphasizes itself in such a place as this, inasmuch as the gorgeousness of the scene at night, while it lacks the splendor of a perfect summer day has a glory of its own, pervaded by a glamor which is irresistible, and which only the night makes possible. Under its witchery the imaginative visitor might dream many a pretty romance. Perhaps there are actually romances developing in those boats shooting the White Horse Rapids, and in gondolas floating lazily over the surface of the lagoon or threading the grand canal. However that may be, it is certain that many people will

carry hence some mid-summer night's dream, which will float into memory now and then in later years as a pleasant reminiscence of idle hours, during which life seemed all sweetness and light. Over the portals of this fairy city there might be placed the antithesis of that dread inscription which Dante's muse found over the gates of the Inferno, the change of only one word making it new and seductive—"Abandon care all ye who enter here!" . . .

Amusement, pure and, simple, is aimed at in all the other exhibitions, although there is in some of them that which might add to the sum of the visitor's knowledge. There are two, characterized as illusions, which undoubtedly provoke a great deal of hard thinking in the minds of people who "Wonder how it is done." One of these is the famous "Trip to the Moon," which was one of the most startling and successful novelties at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo. As a Coney Island attraction it renewed its success last summer, and became the inspiration of the larger enterprise now under notice. It is in recognition of this success that the name, Luna Park, has been adopted for the new resort. In "A Trip to the Moon" the visitor leaves the earth, or experiences the sensation of leaving it, upon a large air-ship, which rises through space and alights upon the moon. Leaving the air-ship, the pilgrim under competent guidance, explores the weird valleys and caverns of our satellite, discovering for one thing that the "man in the moon" is not a solitary individual, but bobs up at every turn, extremely elfin in appearance, though of genuine flesh and blood, and evidently one of a numerous family. In fact, despite their elfishness, the people of the moon appear to be very distinctly related to our own terrestrial race, and the writer happened to hear one of them say to another, in a most mundane way, "Well, this is the day the ghost walks!"

The lunar journey culminates in the sacrifice of the adventurous traveler to a creature of terrific aspect, named the "moon-calf," which swallows him whole, but considerately deposits him on Coney Island again, unharmed, though considerably shaken up by an experience such as Jonah might have been able to describe. . . .

If, as may be, "A Trip to the Moon" suggests to the aerial voyagers a suspicion that they are in the power of a necromancer such a suspicion will be even stronger during the journey of "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea." This is an entirely new illusion, which affords a sensation quite opposite to that experienced in the older one. Like the "Trip to the Moon," it occupies a huge building especially planned and constructed for it, and the scenic and other effects have been secured by a combination of engineering and artistic skill incomprehensible except by the favored few who are admitted "behind the scenes." When those persons who are ambitious to emulate the hero of Jules Verne's story disappear through the man-hole of the big model of Holland's submarine boat, the people standing by see the man-hole securely closed and the boat sink beneath the water at their feet. The passengers in the strange craft hear the splash of the liquid element as they drop into its depths. They feel the vibration of machinery and experience the sensation of moving rapidly through the water, and by means of the conning ports in the side of the boat, which are glazed with

heavy but clear plate glass, they behold all sorts of marine life and vegetation, as they pass from zone to zone. Tropic seas are traversed, and the frozen north is reached, when the boat grounds amid the ice, and the adventurers leave it for an arctic exploration under the guidance of genuine Eskimos with their dogs and sledges. Boreal blasts give chilly realism to the experience, which may be a trifle uncomfortable for those in summer attire, but they forget anything of this kind in witnessing the marvelous display of the Aurora Borealis, which greets them as the exploration nears its end. This is in itself a scenic triumph as startling as it is beautiful, an explanation of which, if it could be given without breach of confidence, would be more interesting than any description of the scene itself. When the wonders of the frozen north are exhausted the travelers re-embark on their submarine boat, and make a return trip under the seas which affords fresh views and new experiences. The voyage ends happily at the point of departure, where the boat rises to the surface in full view of the amazed spectators who generally extend a pleasant greeting to the returning adventurers as they emerge from the dripping man-hole.

These two features of Luna Park are selected for this extended mention because they are emphatically novel in character. All the other exhibitions on the grounds have been equipped upon a similarly large and costly plan. Luna Park, like all great shows, is advertised in that somewhat flamboyant style which is looked for, but is invariably discounted in the minds of those who have frequently perceived the lack of unity, which differentiates the work of the poster artist from that of the people who shaped the show. In this instance, however, no claims are set forth, and no expectations are raised which are not fully met. If the proprietors had set out to create an exposition which would eventually do its own advertising through the stories carried away by delighted visitors, certainly the idea will be crowned with success.

Dreamland hoped to emulate Luna Park's success when it opened in 1904. Indeed, with a construction budget four times as large and four times as many lights, the Beacon Tower nearly twice as tall, and two shoot-the-chutes, the venture capitalists headed by former state senator William H. Reynolds intended to eclipse it in grandeur. Classical-styled buildings, with a vast sculpture for the showpiece entrance, followed the more chaste and formal plan of the White City. The attractions were broadly similar—illusion rides, thrills and spills, disaster epics. Soon after the "Gibraltar of the Amusement World" opened in 1904, Barr Ferree reviewed its architecture for a trade journal. It had, he admitted, no stylistic unity. However, pleasure seekers expected variety, and as a commercial showplace, it succeeded brilliantly. He singled out for particular praise the all-white "palace" of twenty-five thousand square feet and ten thousand electric lights built on Dreamland pier built to serve the dance craze where romantically inclined youth swayed to music "over the waves."

Barr Ferree, "The New Popular Resort Architecture. Dreamland, Coney Island," *Architect's and Builder's Magazine* 5 (August 1904): 499–513.

The value of architecture as an aid to civic betterment has seldom been more aptly illustrated than in the creation of the new popular resort at Coney Island known as ''Dreamland.'' The purification and reformation of that well-known place has long baffled public authorities and thoughtful people. As a place of recreation in the honest, healthy sense of the word, it has long been not only a farce, but an impossibility. That it was popular was well attested by the enormous crowds of people who thronged its heated streets and alleys, surged into its ridiculous music halls and, in general, patronized the inane if not vulgar entertainments spread forth for the delectation of the multitude who wanted to be amused badly enough, and who only took the frivolities that were given it because there was nothing else.

Coney Island has been a favorite topic with reformers who said a great deal and, like many contemporary of that ilk, accomplished very little. Then a change came. The patent fact that decent amusements will pay finally penetrated the minds of some amusement caterers, and a new Coney Island was created in a new place that has since been known to fame as Luna Park. The astonishing idea that any part of Coney Island could be ''good,'' shocked the island from end to end. And it never recovered from the blow. More than that, it has thoroughly awakened to the fact that not only can Coney Island be good, but that goodness pays, and pays handsomely. This, indeed, is the supreme test of Coney Island success; for it thrives on no philanthropic basis; it is money, money, money, all the time; money extracted from the visitor in the delusive amounts of five and ten cents—until, after a few inspections, the unwary one suddenly discovers that a trip that was estimated to cost a few cents, has mounted up into the dollars. As a ''cheap'' family resort, Coney Island has long since proved itself to be the most colossal fraud now on public view. . . .

But first of all, it is well to take to heart the caution that, even in Dreamland, one must not be too serious. It is a play place and a place for play. It has not been created as an exhibition of architecture, as an example of high art, as a realization of a long pondered dream. But it stands apart and alone among the seaside resorts around New York as an honest effort to employ intelligent architecture in an intelligent way as an aid to popular entertainment. In other words, the motto of its projectors may very well be supposed to have been ''Let us not only have many pleasant forms of amusement, but let us have a pleasant place in which people may be amused.'' . . .

One is quite justified in going about with one's mouth open at what one sees. Verily this is Dreamland, and one rubs one's eyes and pinches one's arm to see if one be really awake. Such splendor was never before seen at Coney Island; and this is the first and overwhelming fact. But Dreamland is more than simply superior to anything Coney Island has had before; it stands on its own merits, and it stands on them solidly and firmly. Nevertheless, it is so wholly unlike what one has been accustomed to in Coney Island, that it is not until one has turned once more into Surf Avenue and seen the same old atrocities that have so long defaced that misnamed street, breathed once more the vitiated atmosphere of that horrible thoroughfare, been jostled in the crowds, been saluted, nasally, by its frying sausages and ancient fish, that one comes

down to mother earth and awakes to the painful thought that perhaps after all it was only a dream, and the visit to Dreamland was a mind's journey only. . . .

Dreamland is, therefore, a collection of buildings put to every imaginable entertaining use. One can do almost everything here, from sliding boisterously down a bumpy incline to sitting decorously and looking at the unnatural performances of wild beasts. It is impossible to be dignified in such a place, and if the facades of structures behind which such strange doings are carried on are of a commendable excellence, very much has been accomplished and a new note set in popular resort architecture.

For it is an important point to remember that the attractions of Dreamland, as is the case with all the attractions of Coney Island, are not in the buildings themselves, but in the things within them. . . .

Decoration in color is, in fact, the distinguishing merit of Dreamland. The American public has become thoroughly accustomed to the decoration of buildings by sculpture. . . . The dominant color note in Dreamland is white; this is the natural color of all the buildings. One or two of them are tinted, but the first impression, and perhaps the last one, is that we are here in a mimic White City. One speedily realizes, however, that other arts than architecture have contributed to the general effect. Sculpture has been but sparingly used . . . where it could be used naturally; but there is not that superabundance that has characterized some of our later World's Fairs.

The architects of Dreamland, however, have very wisely called in the aid of the painter, and used, for the first time in any considerable sense—considering the area at their disposal—painted decorations as an aid to architecture. [The paintings on the illusions of Venice, Pompeii and the Scenic Railway] all count in the color scheme, all relieve the buildings of the brilliancy of whiteness, all help in producing a new result, and perhaps most important of all, give a distinct individuality to the whole at a very much less cost than sculpture. . . .

Crossing the bridge one finds oneself immediately at the Bowery. Not the old horrible place that once desecrated the sands of old Coney Island, but a new Bowery than runs out into the ocean on the old iron pier. Here are gathered a multitude of minor matters of too small importance to need a separate structure, a somewhat dreary place and quite remote from the centre of interest. The outward form of the pier is the least satisfactory feature of Dreamland. It is not satisfactory at all; but a barn-like structure, redolent of the Coney Island of the past. One forgets its sordid exterior when one has mounted to the upper story and walked out an almost interminable distance to the ball room, which is truly sumptuous—a regal apartment of quite metropolitan significance. It is two stories in height, the roof supported with columns and arches, between which are balconies for the better observing of the dancing below. It is a brilliant room, superbly lighted at night; a room so fine and splendid in its proportions and its architecture—for it is quite undecorated—that one entirely fails to realize that the waters of the Atlantic are washing the props on which it is supported. . . .

But Dreamland must be seen at night to realize the fulness of its possibilties. If the

tower is beautiful by day, it is supreme by night when its every part is outlined with light, and it raises its proudly gemmed head far above the surrounding buildings. Every part of Dreamland glows with light at night; every building is lit, every post, it almost appears, is capped with its globe of fire, every point that can be illuminated, is illuminated. It is a wonderful night spectacle, brilliant in the fullest sense of the word, a vision of loveliness and wonder, a veritable Dreamland realized in actuality.

In an age when most homes still lacked electric light, and when the bright department store window was a source of wonder, funfair illumination was unsurpassed. Visitors to Coney were often overawed. One traveling at night by ship from Manhattan wrote of observing "far across the restless black expanse, a glow-worm shimmer on the Atlantic Coast" suddenly transformed, when "from its narrowing tail, from time to time, there rose a fountain of green and crimson and golden fire" from Surf Avenue.[7] A journalist attributed the "Renaissance of Coney" to the use of bright light, as well as to astute showmanship. "The age of electricity and science . . . which has destroyed our illusions has created in its place something which is as near Fairyland as we have ever dreamed of." Man-made "fire" was Coney's emblem and summons to play.[8]

The Midway: An Illustrated Magazine of Amusement Resorts and Attractions was a short-lived, monthly trade journal. For a dime a month or a dollar a year, would-be entrepreneurs read promotional articles on investment possibilities; for two dollars per column inch, manufacturers of equipment advertised the latest novelties. *Midway* claimed in 1905 that there were close to a thousand parks which did more business in the summer season than all the vaudeville houses. Electricity, it assured readers, was the key to the industry's future.

Charles Carter, "Electricity in Amusement Parks," *Midway* 1 (January 1905): 29–30.

It is safe to assume . . . that had the electric lighting and power system never been discovered, the summer park as we know it now would never have evolved. . . .

To begin with, to the various electric railroad companies was due the first real summer park. Usually this was situated at the end of a comparatively non-paying stretch of track. Some brainy man with keen observation saw a way to make that stretch of track pay dividends, and with that idea was born the American amusement park. Naturally, as soon as the property was obtained it became necessary to light it in order to make it available at night, when the crowds would naturally appear. Having lighted the park it became necessary to furnish an attraction, for nature unadorned, while undoubtless beautiful, is hardly the material out of which dividends are gathered.

Following the necessity for attractions came the electric scenic theatres, the electrically operated swings, scenic railways and such kindred devices. Gradually a form of design managed to evolve itself, and things moved along systematic lines. . . . The big electric towers, glittering with enormous numbers of lights, the light-fringed

lagoons, the fire-rimmed buildings, all became necessities to attract the eye, and in addition to furnishing light to lend themselves to decorative effect.

There is nothing in this wide wide world so easily manipulated for decorative purposes as electricity. It is a willing servant ready to heat, light or drive railways or anything else that may be required. Few scenic effects or illusions could be accomplished without its aid, and in fact the summer park would be but a dreary wilderness without it.

The projector of the amusement park must remember one fact and work with that fact closely in mind. The park must be attractive at night. To make it attractive by night you must use electricity, and to use electricity to fill these requirements you must purchase the energies of the man or men who know what effect they wish to create, and have the ability to produce it. The electric tower at first glance may seem a useless luxury, yet it is doubtful if there is anything so brilliantly attractive as this feature. The case of Dreamland at Coney Island is an example. The big tower can be seen for miles at sea, looming up over the horizon like a living shaft of fire. What must be the thoughts of the immigrant approaching New York harbor by night in the summer time? Inland the tower can be seen from Brooklyn Bridge, from the heights of Manhattan, and it is like a beckoning finger to the multitude.

Showmen and the "Amusement Business"

Journalists from the popular monthly magazines of the Progressive era used the new language of sociology and psychology to explain the appeal of the "new" Coney Island. "It is blatant, it is cheap, it is the apotheosis of the ridiculous," wrote one.[9] It was successful, he noted, precisely because of its range of options—because it offered so many different opportunities for uninhibited interaction. As the "Tom-Tom of America," Coney Island satisfied a primitive impulse, explained Richard Le Gallienne: "orgiastic escape from respectability—that is, from the world of What-we-have-to-do into the world of What-we-would-like-to-do."[10] Separated from the rational city plan and the purposeful movement of business life by the journey to pier or station, fun-seekers looked forward to anarchic zigzag routes and dizzy spins.

What puzzled Edwin W. Slosson was that so many of the mechanical rides were merely variants of the transportation park patrons used every day in the city. The novelty of these "exaggerations of the ordinary," he believed, was that they gave a sudden feeling of vertigo, a stimulating jolt of danger, ephemeral but intoxicating for those eager to escape from the mundane and conventional.

Edwin E. Slosson, "The Amusement Business," *Independent* 57 (July 21, 1904): 137–39.

Not only do our modern entertainers cater to the ordinary senses by music, colored lights and food, but in many of the most popular amusements they provide

titillation for a more obscure sense, only recently recognized by psychologists, the sense of equilibrium, the sense which is affected when the motion of the body is changed in direction or speed, a sense located in part in the semicircular canals of the ears. This sense, like all the others, is a source of acute misery, the fear of falling and the feeling of seasickness, when stimulated too suddenly or too long, but, when gently excited, gives a sensation of pleasure. The magnified merry-go-rounds, the mountainous railways, the big steel arms which lift and swing and whirl people high in the air, the chutes, the loop, all act chiefly on this sense.

With these must be classed as causing the same sensations the illusions of motion. The haunted swing, where the room turns round and the spectator feels himself to be standing on his head, and the airship in which one goes to the moon both give the false interpretations of the visual impressions the same feeling of delightful dizziness.

To the pleasure of rapid and unusual motion is added in many of the amusements the delight of danger. This is, of course, mostly an illusion, for accidents to the participants are rare, but the apparent risk gives one a sense of personal daring very gratifying to us all, and as each boat load plunges down the chutes into the lagoon this finds expression in a cry for protection from feminine and an answering shout of triumph from masculine throats.

The pleasures of peril are enjoyed vicariously by looking at women escape from the burning building by a leap into the fire net, the trapeze performers and wire walkers, the bicycle rider looping the gap, and the man who dares to be a Daniel and go into the lions' den. . . .

After all, the social feature is the important one in popular amusements. Does any one go to Coney Island alone? To get away for a holiday, to ''go some place,'' is the common desire. Hospitality and visiting in the country sense being impossible in city flats people must meet in public, and little trips by sea or land afford this opportunity. The reference to ''dear little Coney Isle'' in the folk love songs show what a part it has played as a matchmaker. Many a young couple have been so well satisfied with each other in this short journey that they have decided to continue traveling together through life, and a sudden clutch of his arm when the boat goes through the mill-race has often brought a young man to realize how pleasant it would be to have the right to protect and cheer the maiden by his side.

Luna Park's Frederic Thompson emerged as the most articulate and publicity-conscious of the amusement park showmen, eager to enhance his reputation as the "Regenerator of Coney." In a half dozen essays and interviews to boost his personal and business ambitions, especially building the huge Hippodrome theater in New York in 1905, he explained successful management and crowd pschology. Ten years' experience of exposition midways had convinced him that pretensions to education and formal architectural grandeur were not commercially viable. Adults were "children of ma-

turer years" who had never lost their primitive sense of terror. Surprise, even shock, made them forget workday normality and rationality. "Amusement, pure and simple"—thrills and spills, often in exotic fantasylands that stimulated their imagination and suspended their natural caution and reserve—promoted childlike escapism and blissful forgetfulness of life's cares.

Frederick [*sic*] A. Thompson, "The Summer Show," *Independent* 62 (June 20, 1907): 1460–63.

Fred Thompson, "Fooling the Public: The Growth of the Big Show, as Described by a Master Showman," *Delineator* 69 (February 1907): 264–66.

Frederic Thompson, "Amusing the Million," *Everybody's Magazine* 19 (September 1908): 378–87.

Frederic Thompson, "Amusing People," *Metropolitan Magazine* 32 (August 1910): 601–10.

When people come down to the seaside for an afternoon or evening of enjoyment they are not in a serious mood, and do not want to encounter seriousness. They have enough seriousness in their every-day lives, and the keynote of the thing they do demand is change. Everything must be different from their ordinary experience. What is presented to them must have life, action, motion, sensation, surprise, shock, swiftness or else comedy. . . .

When a stranger arrives in Coney Island, the great headquarters of summer shows, the first thing that impresses him is change—difference. His eyes tell him he is in a different world—a dream world, perhaps a nightmare world—where all is bizarre and fantastic—crazier than the craziest part of Paris—gayer and more different from the every-day world.

This spirit pervading the whole place, strangeness and irresponsible gaiety captures the visitor and leads him along, and he is prepared to accept all sorts of extravagances—things that everywhere would be impossible—in perfect good faith for the time being.

The summer outdoor public wants to be amused. At the Island we are not dealing with New Yorkers as they are in New York, but with big children who have come to fairyland and want the fairies to make them laugh and show them strange things.

Hence the trip to the moon and to Mars, the journey to the center of the earth, the descent into the coal mine, the floods and earthquakes and fires and battles are all real to the spectators while the experience lasts.

But in spite of this complaisant mood of the visitors, poor imitations of things represented will not do. To succeed, whatever is shown or given must be the product of the highest art of its kind. The day of roughness and crudity has gone by, and no expense or pains is spared in making the spectacles, the illusions, the performances as perfect as they can be made.

The showmen have educated Coney Island's visitors till they are very discriminating, and the visitors have also educated the showmen. They have taught for one thing

that the fun must be innocent—that it must be such as women and children can enjoy. It must be respectable. Coney Island is frisky, but it knows where to draw the line, and this knowledge is largely the result of the lessons given by the crowds themselves. The clean show pays; the other goes to the wall. . . .

Sometimes I am asked whether Coney Island makes any contribution to morality, and I say decidedly it does. . . . Innocent play is a moral antiseptic, and innocent play has certainly won the victory at Coney Island. Whatever of the other there may still be there has had to take to the caves. . . .

Coney is frankly devoted to fun, the fantastic, the gay, the grotesque. . . .

The Island deserves well of the people. It gives them bright days.

Looking carefully, calmly, over my career in the "show" business, I have come to the conclusion that while some of the people want to be fooled some of the time, and while some of the people want to be fooled all the time, the showman who starts in on the theory that the public is aching to have his kind of fooling twelve months of the year is bound to come to calamity. . . .

Let me explain at the beginning, what I mean by "fooling the public." There isn't any other business that I know of where you are really expected to "fool" the people who come to you and where there is a just ground for complaint unless you do. In the higher forms of the drama the public goes to the theater for intellectual stimulus; it wants to be made to think, and it has the right to demand and to expect a certain amount of intellectual and moral sincerity. But in the lighter forms of amusement—your farces, your vaudeville, your circus, your "big show,"—the attitude of the public is entirely different. It is one that says: "We are young, and being young we want to be made to laugh, no matter how foolish is the method by which you do it; we are young and we believe everything, therefore do the most impossible things and we will pretend to believe them and applaud; we are poor,"—it says,—"make us forget that there are luxuries and perhaps, necessities beyond our means—stir us so that we will remember the hours that we are spending with you for months to come; we are tired and weary and overworked—don't add to our burdens, lighten them by your most fantastic and foolish endeavors." In other words, "fooling the public" for the showman means amusing it. . . .

People will recall that there has never been anything like the Summer-show idea which has sprung up in every large city during the last ten years. These Summer shows are due, first, to the modern exposition idea, then, to an increasing demand on the part of the poorer people for healthy entertainment, then to shrewd business judgment on the part of men who own land near a city, or stock in a trolley company. . . .

I stood at the entrance of the Pan-American Exposition the morning after "Midway Day," and looking over its classical architecture I saw Luna Park complete, no definite style of architecture being in my mind, a number of palaces in free Renaissance, well proportioned and balanced, the skyline broken with countless towers and minarets,

the whole thing a rather Oriental dream; and in that architectural plan lies what I consider the better sort of ''fooling the public.''

The difference between the theatre and the big amusement park is the difference between the Sunday-school and the Sunday-school picnic. The people are the same; the spirit and the environment are wholly different. It is harder to make the picnic successful than successfully to conduct a session of the school; and it is harder to make a success of a big amusement park than of a theatre. There isn't any irreverence in this comparison with the Sunday-school, for if the amusement park doesn't attract people who are interested in the Sunday-school, it isn't going to succeed.

For I want to say at the beginning that ninety-five per cent of the American public is pure and good, and it is this public that it pays to serve. . . .

In the theatre and in the Sunday-school conventional standards of behavior are accepted as a matter of course. The picnic and the open-air park are designed to give the natural, bubbling animal spirits of the human being full play, to give people something fresh and new and unusual, to afford them respite from the dull routine of their daily lives.

The one thing that makes a picnic or an amusement park a success—it doesn't make any difference whether the picnic is made up of ten people or ten thousand, whether the park is a little one or a great international exposition—the one thing absolutely necessary is the carnival spirit. Without that no show in the open, nothing that has to do with people in the mass, can hope to succeed. Whenever any enterprise that is intended to appeal to the million fails, the failure can always be traced to the lack of carnival enthusiasm.

This spirit of gaiety, the carnival spirit, is not spontaneous, except on extraordinary occasions, and usually its cause can be easily traced. Almost always it is manufactured. . . . The first step, as far as the public is concerned, is to create an impression that there will be things doing, to get emotional excitement into the very air. . . .

In big amusement enterprises that appeal to the masses the spirit of gaiety is manufactured just as scenery, lights, buildings, and the shows generally are manufactured. That's the business of the showman—to create the spirit of gaiety, frolic, carnival; and the capacity to do this is the measure of his mastery of the craft. . . .

To create a carnival spirit a showman may use other means than ballyhoos—which means the sample shows on the outside, with the patter of the barkers—bands, freak shows, and free circuses. I use architecture. . . . The very architecture must be in keeping with the spirit of carnival. It must be active, mobile, free, graceful, and attractive. It must be arranged so that visitors will say, ''What is this?'' and ''Why is that?'' . . . .

I stuck to no style. I adapted what I thought was best in Free Renaissance, but reserved the right to use all the license in the world and to inject into everything I did the graceful, romantic curves of the Oriental.

One result is Luna Park, the sky-line of which is utterly unlike anything of its kind in

the two Americas. The architecture of Luna Park helps rather than hinders the spirit of carnival. Luna Park has been, and is, tremendously successful. There are other amusement parks in the vicinity that are chastely beautiful from an artistic standpoint, but that so far as dollars and cents are concerned are utter failures. Visitors admire the buildings—and don't go near the shows. I have built their sort of buildings, too, but not for a Luna Park. They don't pay. An exposition is a form of festivity, and serious architecture should not enter into it if it will interfere with the carnival spirit.

In amusing the million there are other essential elements besides gaiety. One is decency—the absolutely necessary quality in every line of the world's business. There is nothing that pays so well. When Coney Island used to have a pretty bad reputation, there were good shows there, and clean shows, but the influence of evil dives was dominant. . . . It's different now. The clean, decent shows have driven the dives out of business. They can't pay the rents the good places easily afford. . . .

Courtesy on the part of the employee is as necessary as decency on the part of the visitor. If I hear of one of my employees resenting an insult offered by a visitor, I dismiss him. I tell him that so long as he wears my uniform he is representing me, and that I am the only person who can be insulted inside the gates.

An amusement park is a condensed Broadway, if that is understood to represent metropolitan theatreland. In a park the best things of a theatrical nature must be presented in capsule form. The shows must be diversified because the appeal must be universal. The whole gamut of the theatre must be run, and no show can last more than twenty minutes. If you have a two-hour show, it should be boiled down to a quarter of an hour. It is foolish to make people serious or to point a moral. . . .

People are just boys and girls grown tall. Elaborated child's play is what they want on a holiday. Sliding down cellar doors and the make-believes of youngsters are the most effective amusements for grown-ups. An appreciation of that fact made the ''Trip to the Moon'' possible, and ''The Trip to the Moon'' made for me and my partner, Dundy, half a million dollars. ''The Tickler,'' ''Bump the Bumps,'' and ''The Virginia Reel'' are nothing more than improved cellar doors. ''The Trip to the Moon,'' ''Night and Morning,'' ''The Witching Waves,'' and ''The Lost Girl'' are only elaborations of the doll-house stunts of childhood, and they are successful largely for that reason. But they must be short and decisive. I would rather have a good show that lasts three minutes than a better one that runs an hour. And I prefer one that is over in a minute but enables the spectator to become a part of it to one that runs three minutes and never permits him to become more than an onlooker.

Speed is almost as important a factor in amusing the millions as is the carnival spirit, decency, or a correct reflection of school days. Speed has become an inborn American trait. We as a nation are always moving, we are always in a hurry, we are never without momentum. ''Helter Skelters,'' ''The Dragon's Gorge,'' and the thousand and one varieties of roller-coasters are popular for the same reason that we like best the fastest trains, the speediest horses, the highest powered motor-cars, and the swiftest sprinters.

Not only must some rides be speedy and all shows be short, but the employees must work fast visibly, thereby promoting by suggestion speed in the mind, heart, and steps of the most laggard visitors. . . .

To keep up the carnival spirit everybody and everything must be on the "go." There can be no carnival without speed. The moment a crowd of folk who are slowly meandering around catch this spirit they walk faster, they laugh, they spend money, they have a good time.

If I were asked (although, of course, nobody would ever think of asking me), what I considered to be the most typically American Institutions, I should very unhesitatingly say the Genius for Industrial Organization, the American Girl and Summer Amusement. And I should bracket the American Girl and Summer Amusement—they are so very inextricably interwoven.

When I say summer amusement, I mean, of course, what you mean: that thing which draws millions of people to hundreds of places, in scores of cities, over the very broad acres of our land. I mean those places which cause railroad terminals to be choked on hot evenings, and decent Saturdays and almost any sort of Sundays, and crowd and delay trolley-cars, and make much worry for the traffic authorities. If you really want to be more specific: Picture many white steeples, and numerous minarets, and innumerable highly-decorated buildings of every conceivable architecture, from the prototype of a Turkish mosque to the styles obtaining among the more imaginative of the Japanese, with a strain of the architectural fashions which are creditably supposed to obtain in fairyland; imagine swirling things, and tortuous things, and very quickly moving things, and gentlemen with rather bright clothes and (unfortunately) somewhat hoarse voices who make vigorous announcements of activities within; imagine countless crowds of women in white and quite as many men in many colors, strolling, waiting, peering, laughing; being borne off in curious contrivances that rush and dash; being carried again by other curious contrivances that jump and dance—imagine the sounds of distant bands and present chatter; above all, imagine movement, movement, movement everywhere—and you have a tolerable idea of summer amusement to-day, as people understand summer amusement. . . .

Think, then, of the cellar door—the cellar door of childhood. . . . Because that little door had within it the mystery, the thrill, the glamorous uncertainty which is the foundation of all success in the corridors of summer amusements.

You remember—they opened that little door and there was blackness there. They closed it on you and you trembled, trembled deliciously. You wondered what would happen if they forgot about you. You shivered for a little while there in the black and then you issued forth again with a strange exultancy. Your little nerves had cried to be thrilled—and they were thrilled. Henceforth, you regarded that little cellar door with a strange reverence, a joyous fear. And it was a versatile thing, too, because when the thrill of the dark wore off you could slide down its slippery surface and that was another thrill—a thrill that never ceases.

It was not until you grew up and got beyond it that you craved the thrill of something else. And that craving to thrill, that undeniable, universal craving to thrill which possesses every man or woman, boy or girl—is the objective point at which all summer amusement providers aim. We develop many amplifications of the little door, all over the country. . . .

But the thrill is the thing. It has been so throughout the evolution of American summer amusement. When the fat ladies and the tall ladies and the bearded ladies and the thin ladies, and the abnormally strong men and the sword-swallowing persons appeared before you, it was with the simple idea that you should be thrilled. When the raucous-voiced "spielers" of the old fashion proclaimed the thrilling merits of the man from Borneo it was with the same virtuous intent. When they announced "the most stoopenjious creat-uuu-ure" who was "half a dorg and half a man," they aimed at precisely the same thing. And the moving terrors pictured on the old brown posters—those old brown, canvas, weather-beaten posters which we knew so well—had a similar moving aim. It was the little cellar door again—vulgarised—but that same little cellar door. . . .

And the first thing which the summer amusement provider has to recognize is that men and women are not really men and women at all, but only children grown up. He comes to recognize that the average mature human is not the complex thing which he had previously imagined. He comes to learn that all people are primitive in their tastes and pleasures. He comes more directly to his point, it is true, than the exponent of the high-brow drama; but the governing principles are essentially the same. Suspense, thrill and—grateful satisfaction—this is the body and the spirit of all amusement, high, low and middle-browed. Even in the most removed of dramas there must be a thrilling moment. The summer amusement provider learns that he must make his thrilling moments more frequent, more personal than any which have gone before. . . .

This child-nature is the first thing which you must sedulously follow, and study and refuse to be parted from it if you would be a successful promoter of summer amusement. You must learn, for instance, that no truly great success can be other than simply arrived at—provided, of course, that the necessary amount of thrill is there. You will find that the most popular appeals are those which are the most starkly primal—and blood-related to some children's game. Taking a ride, for instance. Only this must be a longer ride, a steeper ride, a more thrilling ride than that which the other children—the children not grown up—demand. The cellar door must be enlarged.

And now begin the problems to be solved when you cater to these children long since grown. Their nature, it is true, undergoes no change. But their tendencies do. . . . These grown-up children want new toys all the time and new dolls are headless ere they are well dressed up. You must make newer cellar doors, more elaborate ones all the time, to replace those old affairs which are flying from the hinge. . . . And as the days go on these characteristics come forth more boldly. Each season the grown children become more insatiable. They are thrill-hungry. They ask a new thought; they demand a new laugh; they clamor for a new sensation. The devices of yesterday have

become older than the pyramids. It is part of the psychology of summer amusements that you must unite to-day and to-morrow.

It is only necessary to look back a few years for illustrations. The humble old merry-go-round which fascinated our fathers and beguiled our mothers to joy—the old merry-go-round with its wooden horses, drawn through the country village by a horse—is gone into the limbo of things. New desires have created the devices which cause you to plunge down steel inclines into water, and turn somersaults in the air, and jump over abysses, and make lightning dashes through gorges and caverns and multifarious other things which must get quicker and steeper and more joyously terrifying all the time if they are to succeed. The cyclorama, not so very long ago too, was looked upon as a desirable and uplifting thing. Viewing the anxieties of others was found to be wholesome and gratifying. You used to watch a shipwreck and be perfectly satisfied. You viewed the fragments of the train wreck with active pleasure. The appeal to the eye then wholly satisfied. All that you desired in those early days was optical satisfaction. Now, however, you must hear the boat crash or the train fall apart; or you must have the sensation of going down some dizzy incline. You are the victim of the snowball of sensation which promoters must follow. It gets greater all the time. . . .

All the subjects may be incalculably varied, but deep-set, within the bosom of each, must be the same potentiality of exaggerated child's play blended with apparent physical hazard. These absolutely must be present or your device will be a failure. . . .

There is one necessary thing, however, which, in addition to thrill, every idea should have. Your idea must be simple in order to be successful. The child-man, or woman, may have more strenuous ideas of excitement than when they viewed the little cellar door, but the fascination of the barbarically simple never dies within the human breast. Your average person does not want a conception to be suggested to him. He wants a conception to dazzle, to stun him, to hit him on the head like the crack of doom.

Neither, in this relation, does the child-nature of men and women ever outgrow that other element which is so much a part of child-nature—vanity.

These, indeed, are the only two appeals which you can make to people in the matter of amusement—thrill and vanity. I have spoken of the average person's inborn hungering for terror, that most overpowering of all human delights. An understanding of the psychology of vanity is almost as important to the summer amusement provider. The promoter of summer devices for amusement comes to understand as no other man does, the overpowering ambition of those grown-up children called the human race to be seen ''doing things.'' . . .

So an amusement promoter comes to learn that the average man wants to prove that he can do things better than anybody else. And the amusement promoter advances—as an amusement promoter—because he knows this, and gives that average man every opportunity in the world to do it. It is for this reason that most of the devices which you see and which can appeal to vanity are placed where every opportunity for observation exists. This, too, has a double effect. A certain opportunity to

view things, or the portions of things, exercises an influence in inducing other people to "do" them too. You make provision in this way also to draw people who take pleasure in watching other people "do it." And it is really to general admission that I look for profit.

A promoter comes to learn, too, that it is futile to make any appeal to class in the matter of amusement. The human race is a great democracy in the matter of amusement. The summer promoter comes to know that all his attractions must appeal to primitive desires—because all people are primitive. . . .

Having got, then, your foundation of thrill and vanity, and your knowledge of the child-nature of man and woman, the aim is, as far as possible, to scientifically cover the whole broad ground of the human senses. . . . If you want to be shocked—electrically shocked—you can become shocked. The sensations of speed, or the rushing of cool air, of falling, of bumping, of twisting, of turning—all are provided in innumerable variety. But the psychology of entertainment demands that the eyes likewise shall be pleased by some little suggestion of mystery or wonderment, for which the human race is ever hungry. And here is explained the fantastic suggestiveness of the architecture. The aim is, as far as possible, to duplicate the cities of fairy stories, in the material—to appeal to the child-imagination in sight as well as feeling. So when you see the imitation mosques and the minarets next time, think of this and follow the mental process of its creation. Notice the classical form and the fantastic shape and know the reason for each of these things, which is an attempt to make the universal appeal to that which exists in varying proportions to varying people.

And in the matter of hearing—bands, bands, bands, for the reason that they exhilarate, and unconsciously excite and prepare the mind for the rushing things about them. They help along what people are pleased to term "the carnival spirit." This is the reason for the band. It has instructions to move about every hour playing, for the reason that it stirs up people and keeps them moving, which means, of course, potential success and money. For the first idea, the very basic idea of summer entertainment is to get people in good humor—and keep them there. When you can do that, success is an almost calculable proposition. . . .

Finally, and in brief, you must imagine your public—your grown-up human children—as a great clock which your experience and intuition enables you to wind up. The average man lives very largely the creature of conventions, the tragic victim of set and settled circumstances. Custom and habit force him to take life solemnly. This is your problem if you are going to be successful as a summer amusement promoter. You must wind that man up. You must wind up the clock that operates the other side of the average person. You must "get him going" as the saying has it. And to do this you must give him a tilt to get him started. Once started he'll do the rest himself.

Of course, all these things sound exceedingly foolish. They are. But it is their very foolishness which makes their chiefest success. Because these, our grown children, like to be foolish at the bottom of their hearts. They must be amused and thrilled. They will admit that it is all foolishness themselves afterward.

They laugh at themselves with perfect charity—and come again.

But the one great secret which the caterer in public amusement has learned and must learn well is that mankind never loses the heritage of its great mystery—the mystery of childhood.

Popular Responses

Coney Island was one of the few avenues of temporary escape available for the urban poor. Of all the large cities, New York had the highest proportion of recent immigrants; by the 1880s, four-fifths of the population were first-and second-generation Americans. East European Jews were the most numerous of the newcomers in the thirty years before World War One. In Anzia Yezierska's novel *Bread Givers* (1925), Sara Smolinsky is embarrassed when the women in the Lower East Side laundry tell ribald stories of unseemly behavior at Coney Island. In 1902, Sadie Frowne, a sixteen-year-old, orphaned Jewish immigrant from Poland, told her story to a weekly magazine interested in the lives of the "undistinguished." Industrial workers labored for long hours, about sixty a week, rather less for those in retail and the service trades, but generally had Saturday afternoons free. Frowne saw Coney's dance halls, like the melodramatic theater, as welcome relief from the tiring, foot-operated sewing machines in the Brooklyn garment sweatshop, relief that was just an hour's journey away.

The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans as Told by Themselves, ed. Hamilton Holt (1906; New York: Routledge, 1990), 21, 86–87; originally published in the *Independent* 54 (September 25, 1902): 2279–82; 55 (September 24, 1903): 2261–66.

Sometimes we go to Coney Island, where there are good dancing places, and sometimes we go to Ulmer Park for picnics. I am very fond of dancing, and, in fact, all sorts of pleasure. . . . But a girl must have clothes if she is to go into high society at Ulmer Park or Coney Island or the theatre. Those who blame me are the old country people who have old-fashioned notions, but the people who have been here a long time know better. A girl who does not dress well is stuck in a corner, even if she is pretty, and Aunt Fanny says that I do just right to put on plenty of style.

In 1903, Agnes M., a twenty-year-old immigrant from Alsace-Lorraine, also told of her delight in enjoying social freedom as a single woman. As a nursemaid, she received twenty-five dollars a month, with additional food and clothing. She spent her two free afternoons a week in outings with German-speaking friends to local beaches, and in dancing.

I like Coney Island best of all. It is a wonderful and beautiful place. I took a German friend, a girl who had just come out, down there last week, and when we had been on

the razzle-dazzle, the chute and the loop-the-loop, and down in the coal mine and all over the Bowery, and up in the tower and everywhere else, I asked her how she liked it. She said: ''Ach, it is just like what I see when I dream of heaven.''

Yet I have heard some of the high people with whom I have been living say that Coney Island is not tony [high-toned]. The trouble is these high people don't know how to dance. I have to laugh when I see them at their balls and parties. If only I could get out on the floor and show them how—they would be astonished.

Coney Island was a strange amalgam of order and disorder, the pretentious and the squalid. In 1905, in a snobbish guide to slumming celebrating the *flâneur* (the sophisticated observer who strolled through the city), Richard Hughes applauded the recent architectural glories but warned that Bowery "plebeiance at its worst" still lingered on the margins. Clustered haphazardly around the three walled parks remained scores of amusement enterprises. Roller coasters, switchback railways, and re-enacted narrative spectaculars, ranging from the classical Fall of Pompeii to the heroic Rough Riders, still mingled with fast-food counters, restaurants, beer halls, boxing booths, vaudeville shows, and cheap nickelodeons with the latest movies. Dance halls were especially popular with the young. The opening of Dreamland in 1904 provided O. Henry with a suitable setting to explore "New Coney" and Irish-American working-class subculture. Southern-born Henry (William S. Porter) was a prolific short-story writer with a close interest in class differences and the lives of New York's "four million." Those of Irish descent were, with Germans, the largest group of old-stock immigrants in the city and a subject for dialect humor.

O. Henry, "The Greater Coney," in *Sixes and Sevens* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1911), 167–72.

Next Sunday, said Dennis Carnahan, I'll be after going down to see the new Coney Island that's risen like a phoenix bird from the ashes of the old resort. I'm going with Norah Flynn, and we'll fall victims to all the dry goods deceptions, from the red-flannel eruptions of Mount Vesuvius to the pink silk ribbons on the race-suicide problems in the incubator kiosk.

Was I there before? I was. I was there last Tuesday. Did I see the sights? I did not.

Last Monday I amalgamated myself with the Bricklayers' Union, and in accordance with the rules I was ordered to quit work the same day on account of a sympathy strike with the Lady Salmon Canners' Lodge No. 2, of Tacoma, Washington.

'Twas disturbed I was in mind and proclivities by losing me job, bein' already harassed in me soul on account of havin' quarrelled with Norah Flynn a week before by reason of hard words spoken at the Dairymen and Street-Sprinkler Drivers' semi-annual ball, caused by jealousy and prickly heat and that devil, Andy Coughlin.

So, I says, it will be Coney for Tuesday; and if the chutes and the short change and

the green-corn silk between the teeth don't create diversions and get me feeling better, then I don't know at all.

Ye will have heard that Coney has received moral reconstruction. The old Bowery, where they used to take your tintype by force and give ye knockout drops before having your palm read, is now called the Wall Street of the island. The wienerwurst stands are required by law to keep a news ticker in 'em; and the doughnuts are examined every four years by a retired steamboat inspector. The nigger man's head that was used by the old patrons to throw baseballs at is now illegal; and, by order of the Police Commissioner the image of a man drivin' an automobile has been substituted. I hear that the old immoral amusements have been suppressed. People who used to go down from New York to sit in the sand and dabble in the surf now give up their quarters to squeeze through turnstiles and see imitations of city fires and floods painted on canvas. The reprehensible and degradin' resorts that disgraced old Coney are said to be wiped out. The wipin'-out process consists of raisin' the price from 10 cents to 25 cents, and hirin' a blonde named Maudie to sell tickets instead of Micky, the Bowery Bite. That's what they say—I don't know.

But to Coney I goes a-Tuesday. I gets off the 'L' and starts for the glitterin' show. 'Twas a fine sight. The Babylonian towers and the Hindoo roof gardens was blazin' with thousands of electric lights, and the streets was thick with people. 'Tis a true thing they say that Coney levels all rank. I see millionaires eatin' popcorn and trampin' along with the crowd; and I see eight-dollar-a-week clothin'-store clerks in red automobiles fightin' one another for who'd squeeze the horn when they come to a corner.

I made a mistake, I says to myself. 'Twas not Coney I needed. When a man's sad 'tis not scenes of hilarity he wants. 'Twould be far better for him to meditate in a graveyard or to attend services at the Paradise Roof Gardens. 'Tis no consolation when a man's lost his sweetheart to order hot corn and have the waiter bring him the powdered sugar cruet instead of salt and then conceal himself, or to have Zozookum, the gipsy palmist, tell him that he has three children and to look out for another serious calamity; price twenty-five cents.

I walked far away down on the beach, to the ruins of an old pavilion near one corner of this new private park, Dreamland. A year ago that old pavilion was standin' up straight and the old-style waiters was slammin' a week's supply of clam chowder down in front of you for a nickel and callin' you "curly" friendly, and vice was rampant, and you got back to New York with enough change to take a car at the bridge. Now they tell me that they serve Welsh rabbits on Surf Avenue, and you get the right change back in the movin'-picture joints.

I sat down at one side of the old pavilion and looked at the surf spreadin' itself on the beach, and thought about the time me and Norah Flynn sat on that spot last summer. 'Twas before reform struck the island; and we was happy. We had tintypes and chowder in the ribald dives, and the Egyptian Sorceress of the Nile told Norah out of her hand, while I was waitin' in the door, that 'twould be the luck of her to marry a red-headed gossoon with two crooked legs, and I was overrunnin' with joy on account

of the allusion. And 'twas there that Norah Flynn put her two hands in mine a year before and we talked of flats and the things she could cook and the love business that goes with such episodes. And that was Coney as we loved it, and as the hand of Satan was upon it, friendly and noisy and your money's worth, with no fence around the ocean and not too many electric lights to show the sleeve of a black serge coat against a white shirtwaist.

I sat with my back to the parks where they had the moon and the dreams and the steeples corralled, and longed for the old Coney. There wasn't many people on the beach. Lots of them was feedin' pennies into the slot machines to see the 'Interrupted Courtship' in the movin' pictures; and a good many was takin' the air in the Canals of Venice and some was breathin' the smoke of the sea battle by actual warships in a tank filled with real water. A few was down on the sands enjoyin' the moonlight and the water. And the heart of me was heavy for the new morals of the old island, while the bands behind me played and the sea pounded on the bass drum in front.

And directly I got up and walked along the old pavilion, and there on the other side of it, half in the dark, was a slip of a girl sittin' on the tumble-down timbers, and unless I'm a liar she was cryin' by herself there, all alone.

''Is it trouble you are in, now, Miss,'' says I; ''and what's to be done about it?''

''Tis none of your business at all, Denny Carnahan,'' says she, sittin' up straight. And it was the voice of no other than Norah Flynn.

''Then it's not,'' says I, ''and we're after having a pleasant evening, Miss Flynn. Have ye seen the sights of this new Coney Island, then? I presume ye have come here for that purpose,'' says I.

''I have,'' says she. ''Me mother and Uncle Tim they are waiting beyond. 'Tis an elegant evening I've had. I've seen all the attractions that be.''

''Right ye are,'' says I to Norah; and I don't know when I've been that amused. After disportin' meself among the most laughable moral improvements of the revised shell games I took meself to the shore for the benefit of the cool air. ''And did ye observe the Durbar, Miss Flynn?''

''I did,'' says she, reflectin'; ''but 'tis not safe, I'm thinkin', to ride down them slantin' things into the water.''

''How did ye fancy the shoot the chutes?'' I asks.

''True then, I'm afraid of guns,'' says Norah. ''They make such noise in my ears. But Uncle Tim, he shot them, he did, and won cigars. 'Tis a fine time we had this day, Mr. Carnahan.''

''I'm glad you've enjoyed yerself,'' I says. ''I suppose you've had a roarin' fine time seein' the sights. And how did the incubators and the helter-skelter and the midgets suit the taste of ye?''

''I—I wasn't hungry,'' says Norah, faint. ''But mother ate a quantity of all of 'em. I'm that pleased with the fine things in the new Coney Island,'' says she, ''that it's the happiest day I've seen in a long time, at all.''

''Did you see Venice?'' says I.

''We did,'' says she. ''She was a beauty. She was all dressed in red, she was, with—''

I listened no more to Norah Flynn. I stepped up and I gathered her in my arms.

''Tis a story-teller ye are, Norah Flynn,'' says I. ''Ye've seen no more of the greater Coney Island than I have meself. Come, now, tell the truth—ye came to sit by the old pavilion by the waves where you sat last summer and made Dennis Carnahan a happy man. Speak up, and tell the truth.''

Norah stuck her nose against me vest.

''I despise it, Denny,'' she says, half cryin'. ''Mother and Uncle Tim went to see the shows, but I came down here to think of you. I couldn't bear the lights and the crowd. Are you forgivin' me, Denny, for the words we had?''

'' 'Twas me fault,'' says I. ''I came here for the same reason meself. Look at the lights, Norah,'' I says, turning my back to the sea—''ain't they pretty?''

''They are,'' says Norah, with her eyes shinin', ''and do ye hear the bands playin'? Oh, Denny, I think I'd like to see it all.''

''The old Coney is gone, darlin','' I says to her. ''Everything moves. When a man's glad it's not scenes of sadness he wants. 'Tis a greater Coney we have here, but we couldn't see it till we got in the humour for it. Next Sunday, Norah darlin', we'll see the new place from end to end.''

George C. Tilyou's Steeplechase Park typified the "hurly-burly" park. In place of architectural grandeur it had a grotesque, grinning "Funny Face" at the entrance gate and clownlike gargoyles throughout. As the park's trademark, Tilyou imported from England the eight-lane, inclined steeplechase track equipped with two-person, mechanical hobby-horses that had been one of the features of the reconstructed Bastille amusement park at the 1889 Paris Exposition. A combination ticket of twenty-five cents gave admission and entrance to sixteen attractions housed within the vast glassed warehouse of the Pavilion of Fun built in 1907. Most of the rides were simple, brazen funfair ploys to encourage human interaction and male-female encounter; they temporarily disorientated visitors by spinning them round, or throwing them off-balance, or surprised them with sudden, hidden air-jets.

Steeplechase was among the parks that "Josiah Allen's wife," Marietta Holley's Samantha, visits in search of her foolish husband. Over a period of thirty years, Holley produced ten bestselling, humorous novels satirizing pretension in a male-dominated world. Josiah is so entranced by neighbor Serenus Gowdey's experiences at Coney that he sneaks off to sample the pleasures of that "frisky, frivolous spot" near big-city Brooklyn. The plump, homely Samantha brings the wise innocent's eye and Yankee common sense to bear on familiar, everyday experiences. The "Funny Place" had a reputation for hiding simple but ingenious devices that suddenly transformed staid country jakes like Samantha into figures "laughin' and bein' laughed at." Holley acknowledged

the humor in the accidental encounters that Tilyou engineered but ignored completely the teasing physical contact between men and women for which Steeplechase was best known; she made the spectacle of middle-aged Samantha's raised skirts and lowered esteem comical but not titillating to the onlookers.

Marietta Holley, *Samantha at Coney Island and a Thousand Other Islands* (New York: Christian Herald, 1911), 251–55, 257–60, 263–66.

Steeple Chase Park is most as big as Luny Park, but is mostly one huge buildin' covered with glass, and every thing on earth or above, or under the earth, is goin' on there, acres and acres of amusements (so-called) in one glass house.

As I went in, I see a immense mirror turnin' round and round seemin'ly invitin' folks to look. But as I glanced in, I tell the truth when I say, I wusn't much bigger round than a match, and the thinness made me look as tall as three on me.

"Oh," sez I, "has grief wore down my flesh away like this? If it keeps on I shan't dast to take lemonade, for fear I shall fall into the straw and be drowned."

A bystander sez, "Look agin, mom!"

I did and I wuzn't more'n two fingers high, and wide as our barn door.

I most shrieked and sez to myself, "It has come onto me at last, grief and such doin's as I've seen here, has made me crazy as a loon." And I started away almost on a run.

All of a sudden the floor under me which looked solid as my kitchen floor begun to move back and forth with me and sideways and back, to and fro, fro and to, and I goin' with it, one foot goin' one way, and the other foot goin' somewhere else; but by a hurculaneum effort I kep' my equilibrium upright, and made out to git on solid floorin'. But a high-headed female in a hobble skirt, the hobbles hamperin her, fell prostrate. I felt so shook up and wobblin' myself, I thought a little Scripter would stiddy me, and I sez, "Sinners stand on slippery places."

"I see they do!" she snapped out, lookin' at me; "but I can't!"

I sez to myself as I turned away, "I'll bet she meant me." But bein' tuckered out, I sot down on a reliable-lookin' stool, the high-headed woman takin' another one by my side—there was a hull row of folks settin' on 'em—when, all of a sudden, I d'no how it wuz done or why, but them stools all sunk right down to the floor bearin' us with 'em onwillin'ly. . . .

And I hurried off till I come out into a kinder open place with some good stiddy chairs to set down on, and some green willers hangin' down their verdant boughs over some posy beds. Nothin' made up about 'em. Oh, how good it looked to me to see sunthin' that God had made, and man hadn't dickered with and manufactured to seem different from what it wuz. Thinks I, if I should take hold of one of these feathery green willer sprays it wouldn't turn into a serpent or try to trip me up, or wobble me down. They looked beautiful to me, and beyond 'em I could see the Ocean, another and fur greater reality, real as life, or death, or taxes, or anything else we can't escape from. . . .

I thought I would go upstairs into another part of the buildin' and mebby I might ketch a glimpse of my pardner in the dense crowd below.

And if you'll believe it, as I wuz walkin' upstairs as peaceful as our old brindle cow goin' up the south hill paster, my skirts begun to billow out till they got as big as a hogsit. I didn't care about its bein' fashion to not bulge out round the bottom of your skirts but hobble in; but I see the folks below wuz laughin' at me, and it madded me some when I hadn't done a thing, only jest walk upstairs peaceable. And I don't know to this day what made my clothes billow out so.

But I went on and acrost to a balcony, and after I went in, a gate snapped shet behind me and I couldn't git back. And when I got to the other side there wuzn't any steps, and if got down at all I had to slide down. I didn't like to make the venter, but had to, so I tried to forgit my specs and gray hair and fancy I wuz ten years old, in a pig-tail braid, and pantalettes tied on with my stockin's, and sot off. As I went down with lightnin' speed I hadn't time to think much, but I ricollect this thought come into my harassed brain:

Be pardners worth all the trouble I'm havin' and the dreadful experiences I'm goin' through? Wouldn't it been better to let him go his length, than to suffer what I'm sufferin'? I reached the floor with such a jolt that my mind didn't asnswer the question; it didn't have time.

All at once, another wind sprung up from nowhere seemin'ly, and tried its best to blow off my bunnet. But thank heaven, my good green braize veil tied round it with strong lute-string ribbon, held it on, and I see I still had holt of my trusty cotton umbrell, though the wind had blowed it open, but I shet it and grasped it firmly, thinkin' it wuz my only protector and safeguard now Josiah wuz lost, and I hastened away from that crazy spot.

As I passed on I see a hull lot of long ropes danglin' down. On top of 'em wuz a trolley, and folks would hang onto the handle and slide hundreds of feet through the air. But I didn't venter. Disinclination and rumatiz both made me waive off overtures to try it.

Pretty soon I come to a huge turn-table, big as our barn floor. It wuz still and harmless lookin' when I first see it, and a lot of folks got onto it, thinkin' I spoze it looked so shiny and good they'd like to patronize it. But pretty soon it begun to move, and then to turn faster and faster till the folks couldn't keep their seats and one by one they wuz throwed off, and went down through a hole in the floor I know not where. . . .

There wuz a tall pole in the middle of the Amaze, as they call it (well named, for it is truly amazin'), and the liebill on that pole read, "Climb the pole and ring the bell on it, and we will give you a prize."

I din't try to climb that pole, and wouldn't if I had been an athleet. How did I know but it would turn into a writhin' serpent, and writh with me? No, I thought I wouldn't take another resk in that dredful spot. And I wuz glad I thought so, for jest a little ways off, some honest, easy lookin' benches stood invitin' the weary passer-by to set down and rest and recooperate. And right there before my eyes some good lookin' folks sot

down on 'em trustin'ly, and the hull bench fell back with 'em and then riz up agin', they fallin' and risin' with it.

I hastened away and thought I would go up into the second story agin and mebby ketch sight of my pardner, for the crowd had increased. And as I stood there skannin' the immense crowd below to try to ketch a glimpse of my lawful pardner, all to once I see the folks below wuz laughin' at me. I felt to see if my braize veil hung down straight and graceful, and my front hair wuz all right, and my cameo pin fastened. But nothin' wuz amiss, and I wondered what could it be. The balcony wuz divided off into little spaces, five or six feet square, and I stood in one, innocent as a lamb (or mebbe it would be more appropriate to say a sheep), and leanin' on the railin', and one sassy boy called out:

"Where wuz you ketched? Are you tame? Wuz you ketched on the Desert of Sara? Did Teddy ketch you for the Government?" and I never know'd till I got down what they wuz laughin' at.

The little boxes in the balcony wuz painted on the outside to represent animal cages. On the one where I had been wuz painted the sign Drumedary. Josiah Allen's wife took for a drumedary—The idee!

But the view I got of the crowd wuz impressive, and though it seemed to me that everybody in New York and Brooklyn and the adajacent villages and country, wuz all there a Steeple Chasin', yet I knowed there wuz just as many dreamin' in Dreamland and bein' luny in Luny Park. And Surf Avenue wuz full, and what they called the Bowery of Coney Island, and all the amusement places along the shore. And all on 'em on the move, jostlin' and bein' jostled, and bein' fooled, laughin' and bein' laughed at.

Two Critics of Coney's Banality

During his visit to the United States in 1906, the Russian socialist writer Maxim Gorky found Coney's tawdry amusements depressing beyond measure. From a distance the island at night was dazzling—as "a fantastic city all of fire," with "shapely towers of miraculous castles, palaces and temples," linked by necklaces of light bulbs. However, by day, once the glare of artificial illumination had faded, there was simply a cheap, "dull, gloomy ugliness." Only the spectacles of extreme danger or cruelty organized by greedy capitalists for profit roused the tired, jaded, pleasure-seeking conformists from their torpor.

Maxim Gorky, "Boredom," *Independent* 63 (August 8, 1907): 311–12.

The city, magic and fantastic from afar, now appears an absurd jumble of straight lines of wood, a cheap, hastily constructed toy-house for the amusement of children. Dozens of white buildings, monstrously diverse, not one with even the suggestion of beauty. They are built of wood, and smeared over with peeling white paint, which gives them the appearance of suffering with the same skin disease. The high turrets

and low colonnades extend in two dead-even lines insipidly pressing upon each other. Everything is stripped naked by the dispassionate glare. The glare is everywhere, and nowhere a shadow. . . .

The people huddled together in this city actually number hundreds of thousands. They swarm into the cages like black flies. Children walk about, silent, with gaping mouths and dazzled eyes. They look around with such intensity, such seriousness, that the sight of them feeding their little souls upon this hideousness, which they mistake for beauty, inspires a pained sense of pity. The men's faces, shaven even to the mustache, all strangely like each other, are grave and immobile. The majority bring their wives and children along, and feel that they are benefactors of their families, because they provide not only bread, but also magnificent shows. They enjoy the tinsel, but, too serious to betray their pleasure, they keep their thin lips pressed together, and look from the corners of their screwed-up eyes, like people whom nothing can astonish. Yet, under the mask of indifference simulated by the man of mature experience, a strained desire can be detected to take in all the delights of the city. The men with serious faces, smiling indifferently and concealing the satisfied gleam of their sparkling eyes, seat themselves on the backs of the wooden horses and elephants of the merry-go-round and, dangling their feet, wait with nervous impatience for the keen pleasure of flying along the rails. With a whoop they dart up to the top, with a whistle they descend again. After this stirring journey they draw their skin tight on their faces again and go to taste of new pleasures.

The amusements are without number. There on the summit of an iron tower two long wings rock slowly up and down. At the end of each wing hang cages, and in these cages are people. When one of the wings rises heavily toward the sky the faces of the occupants of the cages grow sadly serious. They all look in round-eyed silence at the ground receding from them. In the cages of the other wing, then carefully descending, the faces of the people are radiant with smiles. Joyous screams are heard, which strangely remind one of the merry yelp of a puppy let to the floor after he has been held up in the air by the scruff of his neck.

Boats fly in the air around the top of another tower, a third keeps turning about and impels some sort of iron balloon, a fourth, a fifth—they all move and blaze and call with the mute shouts of cold fire. Everything rocks and roars and bellows and turns the heads of the people. They are filled with contented *ennui*, their nerves are racked by an intricate maze of motion and dazzling fire. Bright eyes grow still brighter, as if the brain paled and lost blood in the strange turmoil of the white, glittering wood. The *ennui*, which issues from under the pressure of self-disgust, seems to turn and turn in a slow circle of agony. It drags tens of thousands of uniformly dark people into its somber dance, and sweeps them into a will-less heap, as the wind sweeps the rubbish of the street. Then it scatters them apart and sweeps them together again.

James Huneker was a critic renowned for his wide-ranging art and music criticism and appreciation of modernism. Coney Island, however, aroused all

his middle-aged and middle-class prejudices. He was appalled: the "hideous symphony of noise" from the "savage horde of barbarians" was beyond redemption. It was "a disgrace to our civilisation." And the crowd: "half-child, half-savage," "simian gestures," "a disturbed ant-heap," "bedlam." This was commercial exploitation, not Art—a "monstrous debauch of the fancy."

James Huneker, *The New Cosmopolis: A Book of Images* (New York: T. Werner Laurie, 1915), 154–56, 161–62, 164.

[L]et me tell you of the joys I experienced after I had landed at the Steeplechase Park pier in company with some hundreds of fellow lunatics of all ages and conditions, for when you are at Coney you cast aside your hampering reason and become a plain lunatic. It was a great French writer who advised his readers to make of themselves beasts from time to time, to kick over the slow and painful step-ladder of moral restraint and revert to the normal animal from which we evolved. . . .

After the species of straitjacket that we wear in every-day life is removed at such Saturnalia as Coney Island, the human animal emerges in a not precisely winning guise. . . .

The barkers arouse us. We buy a string of parti-coloured tickets. They are so many keys that unlock to us the magic chambers of this paradise of secular joys and terrors. You may swim or guzzle; on the hard backs of iron steeds, to the accompaniment of bedlam music, you may caracole or go plunging down perilous declivities, swinging into the gloom of sinister tunnels or, perched aloft, be the envy of small boys. . . .

Every device imaginable by which man may be separated from his dimes without adequate return is in operation. You weigh yourself or get it guessed; you go into funny houses—oh, the mockery of the title!—and later are tumbled into the open, insulted, mortified, disgusted, angry, and—laughing. What sights you have seen in that prison-house, what gentlewomen—with shrill voices—desperately holding on to their skirts and their chewing-gum.

What I can't understand is the lure of the Island for the people who come. Why, after the hot, narrow, noisy, dirty streets of the city, do these same people crowd into the narrower, hotter, noisier, dirtier, wooden alleys of Coney? Is the wretched, Cheap John fair, with the ghastly rubbish for a sale, the magnet? Or is it just the gregariousness of the human animal? They leave dirt and disorder to go to greater disorder and dirt. . . .

But at Coney Island the cramped positions one must assume to stand or move, the fierce warfare of humanity as it forces its way along the streets or into the crazy shows—surely conceived by madmen for madmen—the indescribable and hideous symphony of noise running the gamut from shrill steam whistles to the diapasonic roar of machinery; decidedly the entire place produced the sensation of abnormality, of horrible joys grabbed at by a savage horde of barbarians, incapable of repose even in their moments of leisure. Some one has said that the Englishman takes his pleasures sadly, then we must take ours by rude assault. All Coney Island reminded me of

a disturbed ant-heap, the human ants ferocious in their efforts to make confusion thrice confounded, to heap up horrors of sound and of sight. . . .

Coney Island is only another name for topsyturvydom. There the true becomes the grotesque, the vision of a maniac. Else why those nerve-racking entertainments, ends of the world, creations, hells, heavens, fantastic trips to ugly lands, panoramas of sheer madness, flights through the air in boats, through water in sleds, on the earth in toy trains! . . . Mechanical waterfalls, with women and children racing around curving, tumbling floods; elephants tramping ponderously through streets that are a bewildering muddle of many nations, many architectures; deeds of Western violence and robbery, illustrated with a realism that is positively enthralling. . . . . .

Once en masse, humanity sheds its civilisation and becomes half child, half savage.

VAUDEVILLE

From the 1880s to the 1910s, vaudeville was the most popular form of entertainment in the country. Like the European musical hall, its essence was variety. It offered a fast-paced program of music, comedy, and drama, embellished with specialty and novelty acts of human skill and ingenuity, where the diverse acts seemed blended together into a package. Its virtues, *Cosmopolitan* noted in 1902, were "clean humor, nimbleness of action or fascinating originality."[1] Under its broad umbrella sheltered circus and minstrel acts but with a veneer of glamor and respectability that the dime museum never had. It retained much of the raw energy of the traditional traveling show but disciplined its asperities, introduced female star performers, and appealed to mixed, family audiences. More than its precursors in variety entertainment, vaudeville was managed as a business. Entrepreneurs attempted to apply rational principles, standardize a bill, and duplicate it in a circuit of regional theaters they controlled. They exaggerated vaudeville's refinement, for it never quite achieved gentility. Indeed, the tension among energy, enterprise, and edification gave it much of its vitality.

Before the Civil War, "vaudeville" was used occasionally to denote a show of comic songs or a short farce interspersed with songs; these were most common, as Charles Dickens found in the early 1840s, in that forging-ground of popular entertainment, New York's Olympic and Bowery theaters. A generation later, Tony Pastor redefined the variety show of "vaudevilles" and gave it an ambience of respectability. A circus comic and singer and minstrel clog dancer, Pastor opened his own Opera House on Bowery Street in 1865, moved closer to Broadway in 1875, and in 1881 established his New Fourteenth Street Theatre. From the beginning he adopted the tactic of the museum "lecture rooms," and, like Barnum, promised "Fun Without Vulgarity" —"all the latest gems of Opera, Comedy, Farce, and Minstrelsy, unalloyed by an indelicate act or expressions."[2] Pastor balanced his traditional Bowery audience's delight in robust comedy with the wishes of his increasingly middle-class clientele at Union Square. To differentiate his "refined" program from that of the nearby all-male concert-saloons, he banned the notorious "waiter-

girls," offered premiums and prizes, and arranged matinees for women. Smoking and drinking were banned from the auditorium by 1881 and became less obtrusive elsewhere in the building. Pastor's topical songs—he wrote two thousand in a forty-year career—and his one-act sketches or "travesties," based loosely on popular musical comedies and spiced with allusions to local events, distinguished his entertainment.

But, apart from a brief annual tour, Pastor's enterprises were limited to greater New York. Others developed more fully his innovative strategy of lighthearted, family entertainment. In Boston, Benjamin Franklin Keith expanded the second-floor theater in his dime museum and presented low-priced, abridged versions of the British operettas popular in the city. Keith's theater also boasted a blameless moral atmosphere, with indecorous language forbidden, and with uniformed attendants ushering guests through the palatial lobby to luxurious plush seats. This polite music-hall entertainment was glamorized with the sophisticated French title of "vaudeville." In 1885 Keith introduced the "continuous" show, a sequence of nine or ten short acts in a program repeated from late morning to late evening. The format accommodated all in a twelve-hour cycle: suburban women shoppers, and mothers and children in the daytime, and men in the evening after work.

By the 1890s vaudeville was perceived to be the variety show best adapted to the modern city. It was the distilled essence of the major entertainments, lowbrow, middlebrow, even highbrow. With machinelike efficiency, an assortment of brief, fast-paced acts passed in rapid succession—acrobats and animal acts, ballerinas and boxers, clowns and comedians. It was an eclectic mix, a miscellany—magic tricks and technological innovations, one-act playlets and slapstick comedy, operatic arias and high-wire acrobatics. Almost any skill well-executed was included in the program. Arthur Ruhl described the performance of Barnold's Dogs in 1908. In a city street, "the dogs, dressed to represent various sorts of humans, march in on their hind legs and go about their business, especially that of patronizing the bar-room, as if no one else were there. . . . And especially you should see the astonishing animal who imitates a too-genial citizen. With unrepentant grin he starts across the street, zigzags uproariously, even falls and laboriously picks himself up, and finally after several wild and incredibly human attempts, makes the lamp-post on the other side and clings to it. Then the monkey policeman comes along, turns on the alarm, the patrol-wagon drives up clanging, and the unhappy bacchanalian is hauled to the station-house."[3]

Especially in "low-class," neighborhood vaudeville houses, stage sketches treated adjustment to the city—negotiations with officials, doctors, landlords, employers, school teachers, shopkeepers—and the everyday reality of courtship and marriage, parents and children, success and failure. Recognition had its charms for the inner-city poor. A third of the bill was devoted to fast-paced

comedy that abandoned character development and narrative sequence and dwelt on ethnic peculiarities. "The backbone of vaudeville was low comedy," wrote Douglas Gilbert in 1940: "dialect, eccentric, and nut comedians in exaggerated costumes and facial make-ups predominated."[4] It was comedy stripped down to instant identification of stock types and quick-fire repartee. As well as the traditional blackface, "Irish," and "Dutch" (German) acts, it depicted recent arrivals to the city. Stage ethnicity was, Robert Snyder argues, "synthetic," a fiction based partly on reality and partly on theatrical stereotypes, and it was easily recognized by the audience. Cheap theaters were often more authentic. When John Corbin visited Italian and Jewish playhouses in the Lower East Side to see "How the Other Half Laughs," he found their plays "crude and often absurd," but "vital and spontaneous": "they treat the life and the history of the people who swarm to see them."[5]

Vaudeville prospered even during the economic depression of the 1890s. With tickets ranging from fifteen cents to a dollar, its prices were half that of the legitimate theater. When mainstream theater owners formed syndicates, dominated first by Marc Klaw and A. L. Erlanger, and later by the Shuberts, vaudeville also responded by consolidation. The most successful in the East was the circuit managed by Benjamin Franklin Keith and Edward F. Albee, who founded the United Booking Office in 1906. The aim of Keith and Albee and their rivals was to use a booking agency to regulate performers and theaters. This vision of neat bureaucratic order imposed centrally still left much discretion to the local manager. His responsibilities were numerous and onerous. He was required to discipline troublesome performers, make weekly reports on audience reaction to the acts, account for less-than-expected returns, and decide on the best order for acts on the bill, balancing the competing claims of cultural uplift and streetwise vitality. In a "refined" theater it was an almost impossible task to please the rowdy men in the gallery and balcony as well as the genteel in the boxes or women and children in matinee performances. Throughout the 1890s Sylvester Poli's strategy in New Haven, Connecticut, was to win over those of Irish and Italian descent with sympathetic and sentimental, but not demeaning, caricatures, and to entice the reluctant middle classes with more "refined," uplifting culture, while avoiding any hint of disreputable burlesque acts suited only for an all-male clientele. It required juggling and tightrope dancing as nimble as that of any acrobat on his Wonderland stage. Eventually, in the first decade of the new century, the emergence of Jesse Lasky's glamorous female performers, who deliberately sought publicity by defying convention and were popular with working-class women, made Poli's delicate negotiations much more difficult. In the Keith-Albee "Sunday-school circuit," the veneer of respectability wore thin by 1910.

"There must be something for everyone, and while the fastidious may be a little shocked (the fastidious rather like to be shocked sometimes)," Caroline

Caffin pronounced, "they must not be offended, while the seeker for thrills must on no account be bored with too much mildness."[6] The most prestigious "big-time" theaters had included some "name" players from the legitimate stage, particularly European actresses. Sarah Bernhardt, Lily Langtry, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell enlivened the bill, if only for their reputed beauty and elegance, to woo patrons of the legitimate stage. But vaudeville thrived on excitement and publicity, and even in the more genteel palaces, decorum had its limits. Younger, glamorous female singers, often immigrants like Gilda Gray and Sophie Tucker, who wore showy—and usually scanty—costumes, caused far greater problems for Poli and the Keith managers. Their stage routines were openly sensual and mocked the theater's highbrow pretensions. However, provided that flamboyant performers were restrained and doubles entendres qualified, they added an earthy raciness to the program. The "sex-personality" Mae West, however, was too uninhibited for Poli, and banned in 1912 for "that enchanting, seductive, sin-promising wriggle."[7]

The less expensive, "small-time" vaudeville theaters served the local neighborhood and a narrower-class clientele. By 1914 Marcus Loew built up a circuit of thirty-two vaudeville theaters in New York City alone. Low prices—five to twenty-five cents a ticket—made his theaters competitive with the cheapest melodrama house and even the nickelodeon, and with a change of bill twice a week, Loew hoped for repeat visits. He offered entertainment expressly suited to Jewish immigrants on the Lower East Side: combination film and vaudeville bills, amateur-night competitions for prizes, and a beauty contest at his Avenue B theater in June 1915. He showed shrewd business acumen. "When one of his emporiums of pleasure is opened in any city district, half the families within twenty minutes' walk are counted on for one visit a week," journalist Arthur Prill wrote.[8]

Stars were synonymous with turn-of-the-century vaudeville, even if there were few in Loew's cheap theaters. Of the popular "artistes," few were greater celebrities than Sophie Tucker. She graduated from Yiddish-language music hall and blackface to vaudeville where her strong voice and strong will made her a natural comedienne. She lacked the chorus girl's body and looks, but her vitality and evident hunger for success communicated almost intuitively with audiences. She spoke openly and uninhibitedly of her longing in "Some of These Days" (1910), her theme song, and questioned conventional gender roles, but as a "big fat mamma," she won sympathy. Even Sylvester Poli, who had great difficulties in curbing such aggressive, sensual New Women, promoted her in the press as "a personality that goes out straight over the footlights." She was the archetypal star performer-personality.[9]

Variety entertainers came in all shapes and forms, but the most successful, the critic Caroline Caffin noted in 1914, had "that feeling of good-fellowship that makes the audience love to be on confidential terms with the performer,

to be treated as an intimate." "They have learned, either by experience or instinct, so exactly the key in which to pitch their appeal, in order to evoke that answering vibration from their audience, that they can sound it at will, modulate it into what harmonies and expression they please, and ever be sure of the response." The highest-paid star of the vaudeville circuit—$3,500 a week in 1910—was Eva Tanguay, "The Queen of Perpetual Motion," "The Cyclonic One." Caffin was puzzled by her exceptional popularity. Tanguay was an enigma. She was not beautiful; she danced without grace; she sang poorly in a loud, high-pitched voice. Yet the audiences loved her, and screamed and shouted throughout her twenty-minute act. It was an "electrifying experience." Tanguay had "energy, not art," Caffin decided. She was restless, "alive, nervous, vital," with an "elemental dynamic buoyancy" and dashed across the stage in a "whirlwind of sound." Even her unruly hair had "electric vigor."[10] Her signature song, "I Don't Care," epitomized her untamed nature, her wild extravagant, physical gestures, and her off-stage reputation for tempestuous love affairs. Her other headline songs—"I Want Someone to Go Wild with Me," "It's All Been Done Before But Not the Way I Do It," and "Go As Far As You Like"—openly defied convention. Tanguay was a media-made celebrity who courted publicity and press gossip. Her eccentricity made her the quintessential vaudeville star—the individual as the primary creative force, the performer as personality.

Vaudeville Defined

In its first issue of October 1905, the *Midway*, the monthly periodical serving amusement park professionals, commented on vaudeville's ranking in the entertainment industry. It was "the acme of variegated theatrical entertainment," combining the best traditions of the popular theater with the latest technological innovations, and the model of good business sense for all showmen.

"In Vaudeville: A Short History of This Popular Character of Amusement," *Midway* 1 (October 1905): 27.

"Vaudeville," the word, is accepted generally as having been of Norman origin and dates back to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when Oliver Basselin, a fuller, living in the valley of the River Vire, composed and sang certain sprightly songs, which, in time, came to achieve a reputation throughout the country and inspired others to try their 'prentice hands. . . .

Vaudeville, the namesake of to-day, retains the spirit of these early troubadours, entertainers of the passing moment. Joyously, frankly absurd, it represents the almost universal longing for laughter, for melody, for color, for action and for wonder-provoking things. It strikes directly at the heart interests and the foibles of the day. Vaudeville is

creative and progressive. The mind of the vaudeville creator runs, lightning-like, ahead of the public craving for the ever ''new''; and his voyage of discovery leads him into strange haunts. Science yields her necromancy; the jungles give up their royal beasts and human nature parades all her eccentricities and moods, at his beck, for the delectation of legions of pleasure seekers.

Like all other forms of theatrical entertainment, it has had a bitter fight against hypocrisy and cant. The struggle would have been its undoing had it not possessed a vitality drawn from its relation to some of the strongest and most enduring instincts in our nature. It was called cheap by society; it was called vulgar by prudery; to-day it is triumphant in the affection of the people.

The women and children of America spend the greater part of $900,000 every week in proclaiming it the cleanest and most wholesome form of modern entertainment. No other theatre bears the same relation to the family circle. Cater to the women and children and the men will follow—it is a motto that has made millionaires of the great vaudeville caterers of the United States.

An investment of a little more than $26,000,000 in vaudeville is distributed among 300 theatres. More than 12,000 persons find their living in vaudeville and the public is sufficiently interested to expend nearly $1,000,000 a week in admission fees. The 12,000 employees may be divided as follows: Players or artists, 7,500; theatre attaches, 3,000; agents and assistants, 250; song writers, dramatists, etc., 350. The players have invested in wardrobe, scenery, music, plays and other necessary paraphernalia over $1,500,000 and pay the railroads of the country for their transportation over the various vaudeville circuits a sum in excess of $21,000 weekly.

The artistic work of the vaudeville stands on the highest plane, for when 12,000 persons lend their efforts to the promoting of one thing, it is evident at once that the thing must move ahead. Theatres devoted to vaudeville spend an enormous sum for providing their patrons with entertainment. Including the cost of operating the playhouses, this amounts to an expenditure of close to $600,000 every week that the theatre remains open—and a large number of them are running the year round. Some idea of the progressive quality of vaudeville may be gained when it is stated that there is an intense rivalry among the different managements for meritorious novelties; such a rivalry, in fact, as to require a weekly expenditure during the height of the season of $600,000.

The vaudeville bill, or program, consisting of six or eight to ten feature acts, costs considerably more than the average dramatic payroll of a first-class company. In many instances it is double or treble these salaries, although the prices usually are not more than one-half to one-third of those charged at the box office of the so-called ''legitimate'' theatres.

Formerly most of the novelties of the vaudeville were drawn from the ''legitimate'' stage; now the reverse is absolutely the case, and, indeed, nearly all the real ''new'' ideas embodied by the playwright are suggested from the thousands of clever things that have been used by the vaudeville managers. One time most of the big

names on the vaudeville stage were those of ''stars'' from the ''legitimate'' theatres; now quite the contrary rule applies. More new players are graduated from the vaudeville into the ''legitimate'' every year than the older stage has furnished vaudeville from its inception. Vaudeville has been the accepted test of younger players. Vaudeville managers do not hesitate still to snap up stars of the older profession, but they have turned their eyes into the field of newer discoveries for the things that astonish and make a ''hit'' or get a ''laugh'' from the public.

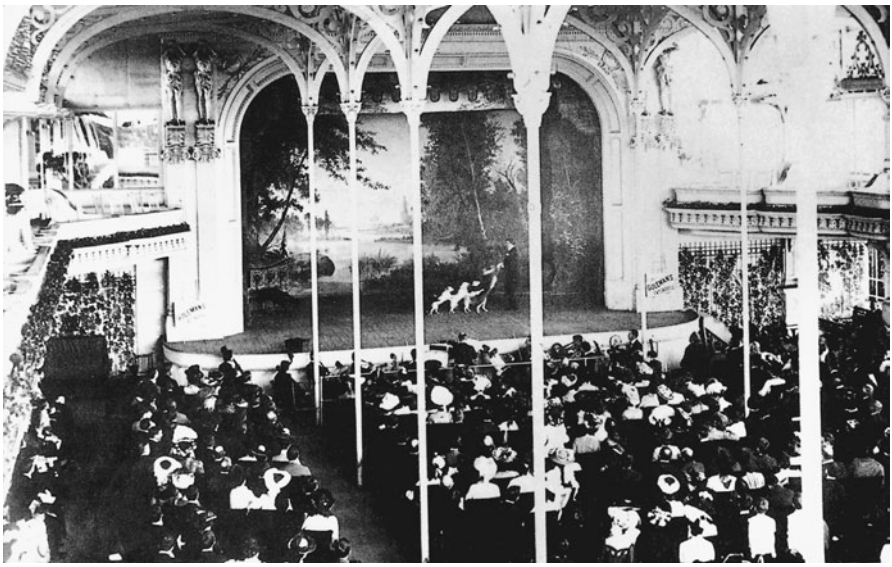
Vaudeville has become academic in its offerings—all that is best of scientific achievements and recent demonstrations in the theatres of the marvelous qualities of liquid air, radium, wireless telegraphy and kindred discoveries have done more to educate the public to the possibilities of modern scientific discovery and invention than a thousand popular lectures could have accomplished.

The birth of modern vaudeville—the perfect form of this immense field of entertainment—began with the idea that evolved in the brain of a New England country boy, B. F. Keith, who wandered into Boston in 1881. From a small start in an improvised storeroom the plan grew and prospered until on July 6, 1885, the present form of vaudeville entertainment had its inception. Its popularity was so immediate that to-day there is hardly a city of any consequence in the country that does not boast of its vaudeville house. From a mere ''show'' with no standing whatever, Mr. Keith has developed his ''idea'' into an entertainment that holds all that is best in the world of dramatic art.

Within the past five years a great change has come over this class of entertainment. The theatre, heretofore, has furnished such simple scenic appurtenances as the vaudeville performer needed. Now, however, the artist is becoming more ambitious, and is having built and is carrying with him, at his own expense, magnificent scenic equipment and electrical effects that hitherto have been considered the exclusive province of the regular theatre. At one time two or three persons were all that were required to constitute an act. Now it is no uncommon thing to find ten and even twelve players on the vaudeville stage, engaged in a twenty-minute turn.

When one can go to the theatre and see the best of dramatic, operatic, farce comedy and comic or music farce and even grand opera, with sprinklings of science, physical culture, some of the sawdust of the circus, marvelous children, wonderful training of wild animals, magic and illusion, all in one performance for the puzzlingly small price charged by the vaudeville theatre, the acme of variegated theatrical entertainment appears to have been reached.

Edwin Royle was a playwright and critic who appreciated the distinctively modern features of vaudeville, so peculiarly adapted to the American city. It was convenient and accessible. "It may be a kind of lunch-counter art," he noted in 1899, because, like the department store or the monthly-magazine story, it suited the quick tempo of modern life. Although serious art might have little place in this ruthlessly competitive and commercial forum, by



A New York vaudeville theater circa 1900, with a performing dog act on stage. From the Collections of the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village.

1899, Royle observed, the "big-time" circuit was so well established that it was able to tempt stars from the conventional stage.

Edwin Milton Royle, "The Vaudeville Theatre," *Scribner's Magazine* 26 (October 1899): 485–95.

The vaudeville theatre is an American invention. There is nothing like it anywhere else in the world. It is neither the *café chantant*, the English music hall, nor the German garden. What has been called by a variety of names, but has remained always and everywhere pretty much the same—reeky with smoke, damp with libations, gay with the informalities of the half-world—is now doing business with us under the patronage of the royal American family.

Having expurgated and rehabilitated the tawdry thing, the American invites in the family and neighbors, hands over to them beautiful theatres, lavishly decorated and appointed, nails up everywhere church and army regulations, and in the exuberance of his gaiety passes around ice water. He hasn't painted out the French name, but that is because he has been, as usual, in a hurry. Fourteen years ago this may have been a dream in a Yankee's brain; now it is a part of us. The strictly professional world has been looking for the balloon to come down, for the fad to die out, for the impossible thing to stop, but year by year these theatres increase and multiply, till now they flourish the country over. . . .

Some of these theatres are never closed the year round. Some are content with three matinees a week in addition to their night performances. Others open their

doors about noon and close them at 10:30 at night. These are called ''continuous'' houses. It is manifest, I think, that the vaudeville theatre is playing an important part in the amusement world and in our national life. Perhaps we should be grateful. At present it would seem that the moral tone of a theatre is in the inverse ratio of the price of admission. The higher the price, the lower the tone. It is certain that plays are tolerated and even acclaimed on the New York stage today which would have been removed with tongs half a dozen years ago.

So far as the vaudeville theatres are concerned, one might as well ask for a censorship of a ''family magazine.'' It would be a work of supererogation. The local manager of every vaudeville house is its censor, and he lives up to his position laboriously, and, I may say, religiously. The bill changes usually from week to week. It is the solemn duty of this austere personage to sit through the first performance of every week and to let no guilty word or look escape. But this is precautionary only.

''You are to distinctly understand,'' say the first words of the contracts of a certain circuit, ''that the management conducts this house upon a high plane of respectability and moral cleanliness,'' etc.

But long before the performer has entered the dressing rooms, he has been made acquainted with the following legend which everywhere adorns the walls:

NOTICE TO PERFORMERS

You are hereby warned that your act must be free from all vulgarity and suggestiveness in words, action, and costume, while playing in any of Mr.—'s houses, and all vulgar, double-meaning and profane words and songs must be cut out of your act before the first performance. If you are in doubt as to what is right or wrong, submit it to the resident manager at rehearsal.

Such words as Liar, Slob, Son-of-A-Gun, Devil, Sucker, Damn, and all other words unfit for the ears of ladies and children, also any reference to questionable streets, resorts, localities, and barrooms, are prohibited under fine of instant discharge.

GENERAL MANAGER

And this is not merely a literary effort on the part of the management, it is obligatory and final. When we have about accepted as conclusive the time-honored theory that ''You must give the public what it wants,'' and that it wants bilge water in champagne glasses, we are confronted with the vaudeville theatre, no longer an experiment, but a comprehensive fact.

The funniest farce ever written could not be done at these houses if it had any of the earmarks of the thing in vogue at many of our first-class theatres. Said a lady to me: ''They (the vaudeville theatres) are the only theatres in New York where I should feel absolutely safe in taking a young girl without making preliminary inquiries. Though they may offend the taste, they never offend one's sense of decency.'' The vaudeville theatres may be said to have established the commercial value of decency. This is

their cornerstone. They were conceived with the object of catering to ladies and children, and, strange to say, a large, if not the larger, part of their audiences is always men.

What I have said does not describe all theatres which may have ''fashionable vaudeville'' over their doors. Godliness has proved so profitable that there be here, as elsewhere, wolves masquerading in woollens, but the houses I have described are well known. Nor have the stringent regulations of these theatres exiled the ''song and dance man'' who was wont to rely on risque songs and suggestive jokes—they have only forced him to happier and saner efforts, and the result is not Calvinistic, on the contrary, nowhere are audiences jollier, quicker, and more intelligent, and the world of fashion even is not absent from these theatres primarily designed for the wholesome middle classes. . . .

A friend of mine was leaving a spacious vaudeville theatre, along with the audience, and was passing through the beautiful corridor, when one of the multitude of uniformed attachés handed him this printed notice:

> Gentlemen will kindly avoid carrying cigars or cigarettes in their mouths while in the building, and greatly oblige.
>
> THE MANAGEMENT

My friend was guilty of carrying in his hand an unlighted cigar.

How careful of the conduct of their patrons the management is may be seen from the following printed requests with which the employees are armed:

> Gentlemen will kindly avoid the stamping of feet and pounding of canes on the floor, and greatly oblige the Management. All applause is best shown by clapping of hands.
>
> Please don't talk during acts, as it annoys those about you, and prevents a perfect hearing of the entertainment.
>
> THE MANAGEMENT

. . . These are the chronicles of what is known among the vaudeville fraternity as ''The Sunday-school Circuit,'' and the proprietor of the ''The Sunday-school Circuit'' is the inventor of vaudeville as we know it. This which makes for righteousness, as is usual, makes also for great and abiding cleanliness—physical as well as moral. I almost lost things in my Philadelphia dressing room—it was cleaned so constantly. Paternal, austere perhaps, but clean, gloriously clean!

The character of the entertainment is always the same. There is sameness even about its infinite variety. No act or ''turn'' consumes much over thirty minutes. Everyone's taste is consulted, and if one objects to the perilous feats of the acrobats or jugglers he can read his program or shut his eyes for a few moments and he will be compensated by some sweet bell-ringing or a sentimental or comic song, graceful or

grotesque dancing, a one-act farce, trained animals, legerdemain, impersonations, clay modelling, or the stories of the comic monologist. The most serious thing about the program is that seriousness is barred, with some melancholy results. From the artist who balances a set of parlor furniture on his nose to the academic baboon, there is one concentrated, strenuous struggle for a laugh. No artist can afford to do without it. It hangs like a solemn and awful obligation over everything. Once in a while an artist who juggles tubs on his feet is a comedian, but not always. It would seem as if a serious person would be a relief now and then. But so far the effort to introduce a serious note, even by dramatic artists, has been discouraged. I suspect the serious sketches have not been of superlative merit. Though this premium is put upon a laugh, everyone is aware of the difference between the man who rings a bell at forty paces with a rifle, and the man who smashes it with a club, and the loudest laugh is sometimes yoked with a timid salary. The man who said: ''Let me get out of here or I'll lose my self-respect—I actually laughed,'' goes to the vaudeville theatres, too, and must be reckoned with.

So far as the character of the entertainment goes, vaudeville has the ''open door.'' Whatever or whoever can interest an audience for thirty minutes or less, and has passed quarantine, is welcome. The conditions in the regular theatres are not encouraging to progress. To produce a play or launch a star requires capital of from $10,000 upward. There is no welcome and no encouragement. The door is shut and locked. And even with capital, the conditions are all unfavorable to proof. But if you can sing or dance or amuse people in any way, if you think you can write a one-act play, the vaudeville theatre will give you a chance to prove it. One day of every week is devoted to these trials. If at this trial you interest a man who is looking for good material, he will put you in the bill for one performance, and give you a chance at an audience, which is much better. The result of this open-door attitude is a very interesting innovation in vaudeville which is more or less recent, but seems destined to last—the incursion of the dramatic artist into vaudeville.

The managers of the vaudeville theatres are not emotional persons, and there were some strictly business reasons back of the actor's entrance into vaudeville. We do not live by bread alone, but by the saving graces of the art of advertising. It was quite impossible to accentuate sixteen or eighteen features of a bill. Some one name was needed to give it character and meaning at a glance. A name that had already become familiar was preferred. The actor's name served to head the bill and expand the type and catch the eye, and hence arose the vaudeville term—''Head-Liner.''

This word is not used in contracts, but it is established and understood, and carries with it well-recognized rights and privileges, such as being featured in the advertisements, use of the star dressing room, and the favorite place on the bill; for it is not conducive to one's happiness or success to appear during the hours favored by the public for coming in or going out. The manager was not the loser, for many people who had never been inside a vaudeville theatre were attracted thither by the name of some well-known and favorite actor, and became permanent patrons of these houses.

At first the actor, who is sentimental rather than practical, was inclined to the belief that it was beneath his dignity to appear on the stage with ''a lot of freaks,'' but he was tempted by salaries no one else could afford to pay (sometimes as high as $500 to $1,000 per week) and by the amount of attention afforded to the innovation by the newspapers. He was told that if he stepped from the sacred precincts of art, the door of the temple would be forever barred against him. The dignity of an artist is a serious thing, but the dignity of the dollar is also a serious thing. None of the dire suppositions happened. The door of the temple proved to be a swinging door, opening easily both ways, and the actor goes back and forth as there is demand for him and as the dollar dictates. Indeed, the advertising secured by association with ''a lot of freaks'' oiled the door for the actor's return to the legitimate drama at an increased salary.

Manifestly, it has been a boon to the ''legitimate'' artists. To the actor who has starred; who has had the care of a large company, with its certain expenses and its uncertain receipts; who has, in addition, responsibility for his own performance and for the work of the individual members of his company and for the work of the company as a whole, vaudeville offers inducements not altogether measured in dollars and cents. He is rid not only of financial obligation, but of a thousand cares and details that twist and strain a nervous temperament. He hands over to the amiable manager the death of the widely mourned Mr. Smith, and prevalent social functions, Lent and the circus, private and public calamities, floods and railroad accidents, the blizzard of winter and the heat of summer, desolating drought and murderous rains, the crops, strikes and panics, wars and pestilences and opera. It is quite a bunch of thorns that he hands over!

Time and terms are usually arranged by agents, who get five percent of the actor's salary for their services. Time and terms arranged, the rest is easy. The actor provides himself and assistants and his play or vehicle. His income and outcome are fixed, and he knows at the start whether he is to be a capitalist at the end of the year; for he runs almost no risk of not getting his salary in the well-known circuits.

It is then incumbent on him to forward property and scene-plots, photographs and cast to the theatre two weeks before he opens, and on arrival, he plays twenty or thirty minutes in the afternoon and the same night. There his responsibility ends. It involves the trifling annoyance of dressing and making up twice a day. In and about New York the actor pays the railroad fares of himself and company, but when he goes West or South, the railroad fares (not including sleepers) are provided by the management. . . .

When high-class musical artists and dramatic sketches were first introduced into vaudeville, I understand policemen had to be stationed in the galleries to compel respectful attention, but now these acts are the principal features of every bill, and if they have real merit the gallery-gods are the first to appreciate it. So it would seem that vaudeville has torpedoed the ancient superstition that the manager is always

forced to give the public just what it wants. At first his efforts were not taken seriously either by the actor himself or the public, and many well-known artists failed to ''make good,'' as the expression is, largely because they used ''canned'' or embalmed plays, that is, hastily and crudely condensed versions of well-known plays; but many succeeded, and the result has been a large increase in the number of good one-act farces and comedies, and a distinct elevation in the performance and the patronage of the vaudeville theatres. This has been a gain to everybody concerned.

It cannot be denied that the vaudeville ''turn'' is an experience for the actor. The intense activity everywhere, orderly and systematic though it is, is confusing. The proximity to the ''educated donkey,'' and some not so educated; the variegated and motley samples of all strange things in man and beast; the fact that the curtain never falls, and the huge machine never stops to take breath until 10:30 at night; the being associated after the style of criminals with a number, having your name or number shot into a slot in the proscenium arch to introduce you to your audience; the shortness of your reign, and the consequent necessity of capturing your audience on sight—all this, and some other things, make the first plunge unique in the actor's experience. . . .

The man who arranges the program has to have some of the qualities of a general. To fix eighteen or nineteen different acts into the exact time allotted, and so to arrange them that the performance shall never lapse or flag; to see that the ''turns'' which require only a front scene can be utilized to set the stage for the ''turns'' which require a full stage, requires judgment and training; but there is very little confusion even at the first performance, and none thereafter.

Many of our best comedians, men and women, have come from the variety stage, and it is rather remarkable that some of our best actors have of late turned their attention to it. This interchange of courtesies has brought out some amusing contrasts. A clever comedian of a comic opera organization was explaining to me his early experience in the ''old days,'' when he was a song-and-dance man. ''The tough manager,'' he said, ''used to stand in the wings with a whistle, and if he didn't like your act he blew it and a couple of stagehands ran in and shut you out from your audience with two flats upon which were painted in huge letters'N.G.,' and that was the end of your engagement.'' Then he proceeded to tell with honest pride of his struggles, and his rise in the world of art. ''And now,'' said he to me, ''I can say 'cawn't' as well as you can.'' . . .

This unique and original world has its conventions, too, quite as hard and fast as elsewhere. The vaudeville dude always bears an enormous cane with a spike in the end of it, even though the style in canes may be a bamboo switch. The comedian will black his face, though he never makes the slightest pretense to negro characterization. The vaudeville ''artist'' and his partner will ''slang'' each other and indulge in brutal personalities under the theory that they are guilty of repartee; and with a few brilliant exceptions, they all steal from each other jokes and gags and songs and

"business," absolutely without conscience. So that if a comedian has originated a funny story that makes a hit in New York, by the time he reaches Philadelphia, he finds that another comedian has filched it and told it in Philadelphia, and the originator finds himself a dealer in second-hand goods.

It is manifest, I think, that vaudeville is very American. It touches us and our lives at many places. It appeals to the businessman, tired and worn, who drops in for half an hour on his way home, to the person who has an hour or two before a train goes, or before a business appointment, to the woman who is wearied of shopping; to the children who love animals and acrobats; to the man with his sweetheart or sister, to the individual who wants to be diverted but doesn't want to think or feel; to the American of all grades and kinds who wants a great deal for his money. The vaudeville theatre belongs to the era of the department store and the short story. It may be a kind of lunch-counter art, but then art is so vague and lunch is so real.

And I think I may add that if anyone has anything exceptional in the way of art, the vaudeville door is not shut to that.

English-born Caroline Caffin was the one of the most articulate commentators on modern culture in the Progressive era. With her husband Charles Caffin, art critic and associate of Charles Stieglitz's *Camera Work*, she wrote *Dancing and Dancers of Today* (1912). Her book on vaudeville was both a series of elegant essays on individual performers and an extended discussion of how stars of the popular arts reflected audience tastes.

Caroline Caffin, *Vaudeville* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914), 9–10, 12–13, 15–17, 18–20, 21–23, 216–18, 221–23, 225–27.

"Our true intent is all for your delight." . . . The ability to recognize this answering vibration seems to call into play a sort of sixth sense, in response to which those whose "true intent is all for our delight" evolve for themselves an individual technique to accentuate the key in which they pitch their appeal. Into the discovery of this keynote and the creation of the technique it is inevitable that there will enter something of that mysterious quality which we call Art.

So little time is allowed to each performer that their appeal is necessarily frankly direct. It hides itself behind no subtleties but is personal and unashamed. It looks its audience straight in the face and says, in effect, "Look at ME! I am looking to astonish you!" It makes no claim to aloofness or impersonality, but comes right down to the footlights and faces the crowd and tells it "All for your Delight *We* are—here." . . .

To provide true delight for a Vaudeville audience you must have as a provoking cause some achievement apparently greater than that of the individuals in the audience. If the medium of the appeal be daring, the risk must be greater—or appear to be—than the man in front would care to face. If humor be the medium, not a single line must missfire. If it be vulgarity, it will be grosser than the audience, as individuals, would stand for. If it be skill, it must be proved as you watch it. You could never amuse

an audience by displaying to it a specimen of skilful and minute engraving, the result of many years of toil. But let them see a cartoonist dash off a rough sketch in a few lines made before their eyes and he has secured their delight. In every case the effect must be vivid, instantaneous and unmistakable. . . .

Watch the audience trooping into a New York Vaudeville house. There is no more democratic crowd to be seen anywhere. It differs from a theatre crowd in the fact that usually more than half is composed of men. There are many reasons for this. One of them is the permission to smoke in parts of the house. Another is the familiar cry of the ''tired business man'' who doesn't want to be asked to think, or even to keep his mind continually on one set of characters. It is something of a mental effort to watch the development of a play that lasts the whole evening. Then there are many men who dislike continual conversation. I suppose no women object to this.

An excuse once offered to me by an habitué of the Vaudeville for preferring that form of entertainment to a play was that, in Vaudeville, if one turn be bad you always hope that the next will be good; whereas in a play, if the first act be bad, you know that the rest will continue to grow worse.

Anyhow, men of all degrees come trooping in; some, alone, some in batches, and some accompanied by women, or more often by one woman, wherein again is a difference from the theatre-going party. Meanwhile at the matinée women will arrive alone and in parties, especially at the uptown houses or in Brooklyn. There is a large proportion of non-New Yorkers, men in town on business trips, college boys come up for a lark, business men with an hour to spare before an appointment. . . .

There must be something for every one and, though the fastidious may be a little shocked (the fastidious rather like to be shocked sometimes), they must not be offended, while the seeker for thrills must on no account be bored by too much mildness.

It is, therefore, no easy task which confronts the manager. And added to his other worries is a demon of which he lives in fear. He seeks it out in every act. He gazes suspiciously at every visitor for fear the latter has it concealed somewhere. I do not know, but I strongly suspect him of holding a ceremony of exorcism every Monday morning, sprinkling every crevice and cranny, every bit of scenery, every prop, ''sealing unto himself'' against its baleful influence every sceneshifter, limelight man and orchestra leader, and even then being worried and haunted with dread of it.

And the name of this hideous demon—its dreaded name—is Highbrow! Of course it never has intruded. Occasionally some heretic manager has dared to take a chance and allow a suspect to appear on his boards. If the venture succeeded, we know for certain it was free from the taint. For it is the first law of the cult of Vaudeville that ''Highbrow Stuff Never Pays.''

With memories of Sarah Bernhardt still in our minds, we may doubt this theory. Highbrows have been known to claim kinship with her and with others who have appeared in Vaudeville. But NO! These cannot be Highbrow. These are Successes, and as such appeal to ordinary human beings. But the world moves, and sometimes a tremor indicates that even the firm-rooted prejudice against the Highbrow is being

shaken by a suspicion that perhaps, after all, he too is a human being and appeals to other human beings.

Let us look again at our audience. There it sits, waiting for the show to begin, good-natured, eager to be amused, willing to accept its entertainers at their own valuation just so long as they are amused. It will applaud faintly even an unpopular turn from pure unwillingness to be hypercritical, but its genuine appreciation is unmistakable. I am not referring to ''tryouts'' or ''amateur nights,'' where the baiting of the performer is as much a part of the show as the slaughter of horses at a bull fight. Those are another story. But I have frequently heard people speak slightingly of a performance and then applaud at its close from pure goodwill to the performer. . . .

But the manager knows that, good-natured and tolerant as the audience seems, its patience would soon be exhausted if he allowed it to be abused. It would make very little open demonstration, but it would cease to frequent his house, regardless of the fact that he too has his bread and butter to earn.

It is that feeling of good-fellowship that makes the audience love to be on confidential terms with the performer, to be treated as an intimate. It loves to have the actor step out of his part and speak of his dressing-room, or hint at his salary, or flourish a make-up towel. There are no secrets, no reserves between them, they know each other as man and man—or they think they do. For the actor has studied the little weaknesses of his audience, and plays up to them.

For he knows that, above all things, the audience is there to laugh. Give it an excuse for that, and it is his. It will seize any excuse to indulge in this, its favorite pastime, and, if it may not laugh with you, it will need very little to make it laugh at you. The slightest contretemps in the performance, and your audience is in a gale. The unexpected appearance of a cat on the stage and every chance of seriousness is gone. Even when laughter was intended, I have heard a queerly pitched laugh from the audience attract the amusement of the house from the performer to itself, and almost break up the show.

But there are performers to whom these interruptions would be well-nigh impossible. They dominate their audience and hold them enthralled under their spell. They have learned, either by experience or instinct, so exactly the key in which to pitch their appeal, in order to evoke that answering vibration from their audience, that they can sound it at will, modulate it into what harmonies and expression they please, and ever be sure of the response. . . .

[T]he most distinguishing trait of Vaudeville is its variety and, unless we recognise this, we ignore its most salient feature. . . . Anything that will amuse, interest, or satisfy the curiosity is welcome. But the welcome is easily outworn and, if the only claim to interest is that of novelty, it cannot expect to have more than a brief day. But novelty is one of the essentials, so that even acts having interest beyond that of curiosity, must be constantly refurbished to make them appear new. What wonder, then, if turns are sometimes incongruous or far-fetched?

Accordingly, we have every imaginable thing, animate or inanimate, keenly scru-

tinized with a view to their use for entertainment. The circus is freely borrowed from and animals of all sorts are pressed into service. We have bears on roller skates; ponies who ring out a tune on hand-bells; and cats, dogs, rabbits, pigeons, presenting episodes that imitate the doings of the dominant race—sometimes in a manner far from complimentary. We have monkeys who play billiards, ride bicycles, smoke and drink and behave generally in a manner so like an extremely ill-bred man that it is a wonder that some of the audience do not feel affronted.

Until the acts are actually tried out it is impossible for certain what will capture the fancy of an audience, and there are some which must rack the nerves of the local manager every Monday matinée, so narrow is the line on which they waver between success and failure. . . .

The desire to see a celebrity, or, unfortunately, a notoriety is the motive of certain turns. And for some reason it seems to make these celebrities more real and tangible if they appear in other than their wonted metiér. To hear a prizefighter talk, or a peer of England talk, or to see a baseball player act or an actor play baseball would seem to demonstrate that these people of whom we have read in the papers are just ordinary folks, not prodigies of tremendous achievement only, but capable of doing other things than those which have made them famous or which their names have become associated. It is not a very elevated attitude of mind, but it is very human and by no means confined to the unintelligent. . . .

The latest inventions of science, if sufficiently spectacular, find easy admittance on to the Vaudeville stage and gramophones, tel-electric and kinetophones are only some of the wonders here displayed. And, apropos of the kinetophone, it would seem as though the time were about ripe for the artistic genius of the moving picture to arise. For, in the case of the latter, we are, at present, in the anomalous condition of having an elaborate apparatus of wonderful mechanical possibilities but as yet no dramatic or artistic technique with which to develop their resources. Consequently, the effect of the voice being added to the motion picture, so far from rendering the presentations more interesting, has only given to them a weapon which they are not able to wield. For, to time voice and action in such a way as shall become natural and easy when represented on the screen has not yet become part of the actor's equipment, any more than to write dialogue which shall not impede the movement of the pictures has become part of the playwright's. We are, therefore, conscious that the two are constantly tripping over and impeding each other, and the slight but lively plots of the ''movies'' are being cumbered up with banal dialogue which makes them ponderous and tiresome. It is like having the joke explained to you, you don't enjoy it, neither does the joker.

Another combination of scientific mechanism with entertainment is found in those living pictures, shown with the aid of a stereopticon. In these a living model, clad in a full suit of white tights, poses before a white cloth, and the stereopticon playing on her makes her appear in varying guises, while the picture it throws, on the screen affords a suitable setting. Anything, from a mermaid to a lady in a winter suit with furs

going to church, may be presented in this way and from these materials. Very ingenious and sometimes beautiful as they are already, there is no doubt that this idea is capable of being worked out to a higher degree of artistic merit. . . .

And so the curtain falls and the Show is over.

Did you like it? Some of it, yes, some of it, no. I suppose that would be the answer of ninety-nine out of every hundred of the dispersing audience.

Well! it is YOUR show. It is there because it is what is wanted by the average of you. If you want it different you only have to make the demand loud enough, large enough, persistent enough. For these figures you can see on the stage are but a reflection of what YOU, their creators want. They are the shadows cast on the screen by the actors in the old-time gallanty show. The figures may be dwarfed to insignificance or enlarged to preposterous size. Yet they are but the figures of you, yourselves, and represent, if not your actual appearance, some travesty of it made by the relation your own form bears to the source of its inspiration. More or less truly it throws upon its screen the current sentiment of the day. We cannot escape from its influence. The echoes of its songs are in our streets, our homes, our ballrooms, we hear them at our parades and public ceremonies and here, as I write these words, far from the busy streets, amid woods and hills, the sounds are borne to me over the water of young voices chanting in chorus, and the song is a song of Vaudeville. . . .

We have put our entertainers behind the frame of a proscenium arch and let down a curtain to mark the division between actor and audience. But the actor is still the reflection of his audience.

The Business

Benjamin Franklin Keith modernized variety theater. In 1883 he opened the storefront New York Dime Museum in a prime location on Washington Street in Boston's central business district. The improvised stage upstairs proved more attractive to downtown office workers and shoppers than the human oddities, and Keith found that abridged and burlesqued versions of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas were especially popular. It was the "continuous" show that he introduced in 1885 to give the impression of steady patronage that made his reputation. Keith and his general manager Edward Albee were not stage entertainers like Tony Pastor in New York City, but like Pastor they understood the importance of decency and morality in attracting those aspiring to middle-class status. Their target audience was the white-collar clerical and sales personnel who serviced the offices and retail stores in the expanding cities, a group that grew from less than 3 percent of the population in 1870 to 11 percent in 1920. Keith also hoped both to compete with the cheap amusements of the dance halls and trolley parks, and, at least occasionally, to tempt patrons of the legitimate theater to his variety halls with programs of high-quality music and drama.

Administration was Keith and Albee's forte, and they used sound management to build a small empire of theaters in New England. By 1893 they owned another theater in Boston and others in Providence, Philadelphia, and New York. In 1906 they founded the United Booking Office to administer a much larger business empire, which, in uneasy alliance with Martin Beck's Orpheum circuit on the West Coast, extended across much of the country. Their aim was vertical integration: to control every detail of vaudeville production from the salaries and schedules of major artistes to the conduct of performances in every theater in their circuit. As the most successful entrepreneur in the business, Keith explained his philosophy.

B. F. Keith, "The Vogue of The Vaudeville," *National Magazine* 9 (November 1898): 146–53.

It was clear that the majority of people would stay through an entertainment so long as they could, even sitting out acts that had to be repeated. The old form necessitated a final curtain at a specified time, and the emptying of the house. As a result the succeeding audience gathered slowly, the theatre was necessarily dreary as they came into it, and there was nothing going on. Did you ever notice the hesitancy on the part of early comers to a playhouse to assume their seats in the auditorium, how they hang back until reassured by numbers? Well, that is one of the things the continuous performance does away with. It matters not at what hour of the day or evening you visit, the theatre is always occupied by more or less people, the show is in full swing, everything is bright, cheerful and inviting. In this connection, I remember that in the days of my first shows (prior to the opening of the Bijou), I was always maneuvering to keep patrons moving up and down stairs in view of passersby on the sidewalk for the specific purpose of impressing them with the idea that business was immense. . . .

For the benefit of those who have never enjoyed a vaudeville show of the continuous order, I might explain that it is designed to run twelve hours, during which period performers appear two or three times, as it would be manifestly impossible to secure enough different acts to fill out the dozen hours. The best class of artists appear twice, just as at a matinee and evening performance in a dramatic theatre, and the balance do three "turns." . . .

Two things I determined at the outset should prevail in the new scheme. One was that my fixed policy of cleanliness and order should be continued, and the other that the stage show must be free from vulgarisms and coarseness of any kind, so that the house and entertainment would directly appeal to the support of ladies and children—in fact that my playhouse must be as "homelike" an amusement resort as it was possible to make it. While a certain proportion of the male sex may favor stage performances of a risqué order, none of them would care to bring the female members of their families to witness an entertainment of that description.

The advent of dramatic players into my theatres has been distinctly beneficial, in that it has added the element of novelty, which is the essence of vaudeville, and has

attracted the attention of a desirable class of patrons whose previous knowledge of a variety entertainment had been very vague and largely governed by tradition. As to the sort of entertainment which seems to please most, light, frothy acts, with no particular plot, but abounding in songs, dances, bright dialogue and clean repartee, seem to appeal most to the vaudeville audiences of the present time. But, it is quite evident that a thoroughly good program, in its entirety, is what draws the public, rather than individual acts. . . . The most marked improvement is the tendency of artists to keep their acts clean and free from coarseness, and to do away with the ridiculous costumes which were formerly a glaring defect of nearly all vaudeville entertainments. Added to this is the closer attention paid to stage setting, and scenic embellishment generally.

The character of the vaudeville audience has notably improved in recent years, and the entertainment of today is freely patronized and enjoyed by the most intelligent and cultivated people, who flatter me by the assurance which their presence in my theatres brings that they have confidence in my pledge that therein nothing shall be given which could not with perfect safety be introduced to their homes.

Hartley Davis, a journalist experienced in writing on vaudeville, noted its efficiency and economy. Entrepreneurs were shrewd businessmen who saw a market for popular-priced entertainment and exploited it.

Hartley Davis, "In Vaudeville," *Everybody's Magazine* 13 (August 1905): 231, 238.

Hartley Davis, "The Business Side of Vaudeville," *Everybody's Magazine* 17 (October 1907), 529, 537.

There is a cheerful frivolity in vaudeville which makes it appeal to more people of widely divergent interests than does any other form of entertainment. It represents the almost universal longing for laughter, for melody, for color, for action, for wonder-provoking things. It exacts no intellectual activity on the part of those who gather to enjoy it; in its essence it is an enemy to responsibility, to worries, to all the little ills of life. It is joyously, frankly absurd, from the broad, elemental nonsense of the fun-makers to the marvellous acrobatic feats of performers who conceive immensely difficult things for the pleasure of doing them. Vaudeville brings home to us the fact that we are children of a larger growth, and this is one of the finest things about it. . . .

The great demand in vaudeville is for low comedy with plenty of action. Broad sweeping effects without too much detail are wanted. The artistic "legitimate" actor wastes too much time in working up to his points, but the skilled vaudevillist strikes them with a single blow and scores. A successful vaudeville sketch concentrates in one act as many laughs and as much action as are usually distributed over a three-act comedy.

In the good vaudeville, houses, the salary list of performers ranges from $2,500 to $4,000 a week, and the maximum is paid more often than the minimum. Occasionally

the cost will run to $5,000 a week. The standard in practically every first-class vaudeville house in the country is $3,200 a week, and each manager tries to keep as close to that as possible. It has been found that this will provide an attractive bill and yet leave a fair margin of profit.

Now, by way of contrast, consider that the prices charged in these vaudeville theatres are just one-half, or oftener one-third, the prices of admission charged in the theatres presenting first-class attractions. In New York, for instance, the highest price for orchestra seats is one dollar, with box seats fifty cents more, and the downward range is to twenty-five cents. And this is the schedule of only a few houses. The usual rule for first-class vaudeville houses is fifty cents for the best seats, except those in the boxes, which are twenty-five and fifty cents more. Often the gallery seats are only ten cents, and when two performances a day are given, it is the universal custom to cut in half the higher prices for matinees.

The most popular acts are those that make people laugh, whether they be monologues, sketches, or acrobatic stunts, and to make vaudeville audiences roar, it is necessary to make a very simple, very direct appeal. . . .

The newest development in vaudeville is the presentation of elaborate ensemble acts with fine scenery and costumes. These have been so successful that there are regular producers of them, like Ned Wayburn, George Homans, and Lasky, Rolfe and Company. For ''The Stunning Grenadiers,'' Lasky, Rolfe and Company imported a bevvy of strapping English girls, provided them with three changes of costume and three sets of scenery, as well as lighting effects. At least $5,000 was invested in this single act, which runs the usual twenty minutes. ''The Pianophiends'' cost nearby as much, for the young men and women who play six pianos in concert wear fashionable and expensive clothes and the scenery is as fine as can be painted. George Homans imported Italian opera singers for his Zingari troupe, and the stage setting, with its elaborate lighting effects, is as artistic as that seen in high-priced regular theatres. It takes twelve people to present ''A Night with the Poets,'' including a male quartet that wears evening clothes costing $90 for each member, people who pose as living pictures, and an actor who can read poetry.

These big acts usually receive from $750 to $1,500 a week. The producer, who is also the manager, must pay the original cost, the salaries of the people he employs, and the transportation of the people and the scenery. His net profit on each act when it is playing averages about $100 a week. It's easier to book one of these big ensemble acts that costs a great deal than to book a cheaper one, because the vaudeville managers have found that audiences have been educated up to demanding the best that can be given them, and when people are pleased it means full houses. The managers make the audiences feel that they are receiving about double their money's worth. It's all business.

Brett Page, author of the most authoritative guide to the vaudeville profession, asserted that organizing the "diverse elements" of the weekly program to

"combine to form a unified whole" required genius. To illustrate his point, Page quoted George A. Gottlieb, booking agent at Keith's Palace Theatre in New York, the most prestigious in the country. Gottlieb explained the art of devising the weekly program.

Brett Page, *Writing for Vaudeville: with nine complete examples of various vaudeville forms . . .* (Springfield, Mass.: Home Correspondence School, 1915), 6–12.

We usually select a "dumb act" for the first act on the bill. It may be a dancing act, some good animal act, or any act that makes a good impression and will not be spoiled by the late arrivals seeking their seats. Therefore it sometimes happens that we make use of a song-and-dance turn, or any other little act that does not depend on its words being heard.

For number two position we select an interesting act of the sort recognized as a typical "vaudeville act." It may be almost anything at all, though it should be more entertaining than the first act. For this reason it often happens that a good man-and-woman singing act is placed here. This position on the bill is to "settle" the audience and prepare it for the show.

With "number three" position we count on waking up the audience. The show has been properly started and from now on it must build right up to the finish. So we offer a comedy dramatic sketch—a playlet that wakens the interest and holds the audience every minute with a cumulative effect that comes to its laughter-climax at the "curtain," or any other kind of act that is not of the same order as the preceding turn, so that, having laid the foundations, we may have the audience wondering what is to come next.

For number four position we must have a "corker" of an act—and a "name." It must be the sort of act that will rouse the audience to expect still better things, based on the fine performance of the previous numbers. Maybe this act is the first big punch of the show; anyway, it must strike home and build the interest for the act that follows.

And here for number five position, a big act, and at the same time another big name, must be presented. Or it might be a big dancing act—one of those delightful novelties vaudeville likes so well. In any event this act must be as big a "hit" as any on the bill. It is next to intermission and the audience must have something really worth while to talk over. And so we select one of the best acts on the bill to crown the first half of the show.

The first act after intermission, number six on the bill, is a difficult position to fill, because the act must not let down the carefully built-up tension of interest and yet it must not be stronger than the acts that are to follow. Very likely there is chosen a strong vaudeville specialty, with comedy well to the fore. Perhaps a famous comedy dumb act is selected, with the intention of getting the audience back in its seats without too many conspicuous interruptions of what is going on the stage. Any sort of act that makes a splendid start-off is chosen, for there has been a fine first half and the

second half must be built up again—of course the process is infinitely swifter in the second half of the show—and the audience brought once more into a delighted-expectant attitude.

Therefore the second act after intermisson—number seven—must be stronger than the first. It is usually a full-stage act and again must be another big name. Very likely it is a big playlet, if another sketch has not been presented earlier on the bill. It may be a comedy playlet or even a serious dramatic playlet, if the star is a fine actor or actress and the name is well known. Or it may be anything at all that builds up the interest and appreciation of the audience to welcome the ''big'' act that follows.

For here in number eight position—next to closing on a nine-act bill—the comedy hit of the show is usually placed. It is one of the acts for which the audience has been waiting. Usually it is one of the famous ''single'' man or ''single'' woman acts that vaudeville has made such favorites.

And now we come to the act that closes the show. We count on the fact that some of the audience will be going out. Many have only waited to see the chief attraction of the evening, before hurrying off to their after-theatre supper and dance. So we spring a big ''flash.'' It must be an act that does not depend for its success upon being heard perfectly. Therefore a ''sight'' act is chosen, an animal act maybe, to please the children, or a Japanese troupe with their gorgeous kimonos and vividly harmonizing stage draperies, or a troupe of white-clad trapeze artists flying against a background of black. Whatever the act is, it must be a showy act, for it closes the performance and sends the audience home pleased with the program to the very last minute.

Now all the time a booking-manager is laying out his show, he has not only had these many artistic problems on his mind, but also the mechanical working of the show. For instance, he must consider the actual physical demands of his stage and not place next to each other two full-stage acts. If he did, how would the stage hands change the scenery without causing a long and tedious wait? In vaudeville there must be no waits. Everything must run with unbroken stride. One act must follow another as though it were especially made for the position. And the entire show must be dovetailed to the split seconds of a stop-watch. . . .

But there is still another problem the manager must solve. ''Variety'' is vaudeville's paternal name—vaudeville must present a *varied* bill and a show consisting of names that will tend to have a box-office appeal. No two acts in a show should be alike. No two can be permitted to conflict. ''Conflict'' is a word that falls with ominous meaning on a vaudeville performer's or manager's ears, because it means death to one of the acts and injury to the show as a whole. If two famous singing ''single'' women were placed on the same bill, very likely there would be odious comparisons—even though they did not use songs that were alike. And however interesting each might be, both would lose in interest. And yet, sometimes we do just this one thing—violating a minor rule to win a great box-office appeal.

Part of the many sides of this delicate problem may be seen when you consider

that no two ''single'' singing acts should be placed next each other—although they may not conflict if they are placed far apart on the bill. And no two ''quiet'' acts may be placed together. The tempo of the show must be maintained—and because tragic playlets, and even serious playlets, are suspected of ''slowing up a show,'' they are not booked unless very exceptional.

In 1913 two very experienced theatrical professionals joined forces to give a master class on the techniques of stagecraft. George M. Cohan was born into a vaudeville family, had thirty years' experience of writing, producing, and performing musical comedy, and had great success with songs like "Yankee Doodle Dandy" in 1904. George Jean Nathan was also youthful but already the leading critic and commentator on the popular theater. They advised close attention to formula. To "reach an audience's inmost recesses and cause it to collapse into tears, laughter, or horror," they wrote, was largely "a matter of mechanical preparation."

George M. Cohan and George J. Nathan, "The Mechanics of Emotion," *McClure's Magazine* 42 (November 1913): 70–77.

Given the average crowd in a theater, the experienced playwright, in the quiet of his study, can figure out in advance precisely what constituents in his play will produce particular effects.

In physiology there are certain familiar phenomena known technically as reflex actions. . . .

Reflex Emotions

Now, there are emotional reflexes as well as physical reflexes. There are certain outside stimuli, forces that will automatically make us, without much conscious action on our part, laugh, weep, or freeze with horror. Many of these emotional reflexes were at first unquestionably conscious acts. We laughed or cried because there was something in the stimulus that appealed to our human intelligence as being funny or pathetic. A constant repetition, however, has given these particular emotions the character of reflex actions. At first we roared or sobbed with our brains; now we do so largely with our spinal cords.

As a matter of fact the playwright has his audience at a distinct advantage. It comes to the theater for one definite purpose, to have its emotions played upon; this experience gives such exquisite delight and satisfaction, indeed, that the average citizen is willing to pay liberally for it. . . .

We All Laugh and Cry at the Same Things

It is a mistake to suppose that from the standpoint of the fundamental emotions we are not all alike. Emotionally we are essentially the same. Mere buffoonery has delighted many of the world's greatest minds. . . . The emotional lives of all men follow a

fixed norm, precisely as do their physical lives. In the main, the same elemental ideas that ''got a rise'' out of our ancestors will do the same for us. Perhaps the permanence, through the ages, of the same type of humor is best illustrated by the circus clown.

If we are normal, we all cry at the same things, laugh at the same things, and these expedients are, for the most part, artless and simple—so simple that, under ordinary circumstances, we should indignantly repudiate the suggestion that they could move us. But the playwright knows exactly what they are. He has invented them; he has inherited them. His predecessors used them over and over again; his successors will use them to the end of time. In his own language he calls them his ''bag of tricks,'' or, sometimes, more dignifiedly, his ''tools of emotion.'' If produced at the right moment and with sufficient skill, they never fail to strike the audience in the midriff. They comprise the complete science of the ''lump in the throat.'' They may be regarded as the germs or bacilli of emotions. He can inoculate audiences with them and get just as definite results as do the scientists when they inoculate their guinea-pigs with the microbes of disease. And he does so just as deliberately.

These emotion germs are hundreds in number, and they fall logically into three great classes: (1) Fears; (2) Laughs; (3) Thrills. . . .

Things that Act upon the Tear-Ducts

[Thirty examples of melodramatic situations or sentimental scenes with stereotypical characters.] Why is it that these simple expedients arouse the pathetic in us? This is a question for the psychologist. Probably stage tradition plays a considerable part. For generations the human family has been moved by situations of this kind, and has grown accustomed to them. The emotions aroused, as already said, are largely reflex in character. Fundamentally, however, these stage contrivances represent a transcript from nature. Most of them are ''sad'' in real life as they are ''sad'' upon the stage. A man driving an errant daughter out into a snow-storm—that much ridiculed episode of modern ''mellerdrammer''—would unquestionably arouse our pity in real life. So, down at the core of what have become merely mechanical stratagems for the arousing of theatrical emotion, constant, immutable human nature declares itself.

But the theater must play upon other emotions than the pathetic. The playwright must make his audiences laugh, and here again his predecessors have laid down the essential formulas. Here again, the contrivances used are largely mechanical. For years, the playwrights have servilely depended upon them for ''laughs,'' and will unquestionably always do so. And these devices are found not only in cheap farce and ''slap-stick'' plays, but in legitimate drama. . . .

Some Things Men Laugh At

[Fifteen examples, almost all involving non-verbal gestures.] All these ''laugh-getters'' are known to be experienced as ''high class''; that is, they may all be used upon the legitimate stage. On the burlesque and vaudeville stage devices of a somewhat lower intellectual plane have established a permanent standing. . . .

The most successful tricks or jokes are all based on the *idea* of pain or embarrassment. Tacks made of rubber, matches that explode or refuse to light, exploding cigars or cigarettes, fountain-pens that smear ink over the fingers immediately they are to put to use, ''electric'' bells with pins secreted in their push buttons, and boutonnières that squirt water into the face of the beholder, are a few familiar examples.

''Thrill'' and ''Suspense''

[Twelve examples of the use of sound or lighting effects to produce dramatic tension.] We pass now to the spine and to that side of theatrical mechanics known as ''thrill'' and ''suspense.'' In the secret ritual there are as many mechanical tricks wherewith to excite and thrill an audience and keep it in suspense as there are tricks to make it cry or weep. . . .

Every one of the different elements of thrill mechanics will be found to rest upon substantial grounds, even if the introduction of the thrill mechanics in certain parts of plays is made for mere trickiness. The reader must recall again that the audience is at the moment unaware that the thunder-clap or the mysterious locked door or the shadow against the wall, or whatever it is, has been utilized arbitrarily by the stage artificer, and that it may have absolutely nothing to do with what follows. The quality of suspense is shot into the audience on the spot. If, subsequently, the audience says to itself, ''We were fooled,'' it does not matter. It will have been made to feel suspense—and that is all the trafficker in theatrical tricks has aimed for!

The secret of stage effectiveness rests in the impression of the moment. . . . All the ''mechanics of emotion'' are based, from the theatrical craftsman's point of view, on this one solid fact.

Routines

In his 1915 manual, Brett Page singled out Aaron Hoffman as unusually talented, and pronounced one of his vaudeville sketches "perhaps the best example of the pure monologue ever written." Hoffman's "The Horse Doctor" was a classic slapstick farce of mistaken identities, timed to fit a fifteen-minute spot in the program, and one of dozens that he wrote. In the early twentieth century, a "soubrette," the female character in this sketch, was a maid, but more generally in the theater, a young flirtatious woman who served as an attractive foil for the comic.

Aaron Hoffman, "A Comedy Sketch entitled The Horse Doctor" (manuscript, 1911, Rare Book and Special Collection Division, Library of Congress) [American Memory: The American Variety Stage: Vaudeville and Popular Entertainment, 1870–1920, http://memory.loc.gov].

A COMEDY SKETCH
entitled
THE HORSE DOCTOR
by
Aaron Hoffman

SCENE PLOT. C. D. F. [center door front] in three. Boxed set. *Doors R. and L. Furniture, bric-abrac, fireplace and mantle, etc., etc.*

Opening lively curtain music.

(*Enter* SOUBRETTE *at rise of curtain.*)

Well, this is the limit. The house is all upset. Yesterday one of our best horses was taken sick, we sent for a horse doctor, but he hasn't put in an appearance as yet, and now, poor Mr. Knight is sick in bed all day. His wife, Mrs. Knight, went down to the station to meet the doctor, and his young daughter, Miss Knight, left me here in charge of Lord How Poor. A young nobleman wants to marry her; she said he might come in some disguise, and she offered me fifty dollars to get rid of him, and you can just bet I will, because I need the money.

(*Bell rings outside.*)

I guess I'll go and see if Mr. Knight wants anything. I don't care what he wants as long as I get that fifty.

(*Exits door R.*)

(*Enter COMEDIAN.*) (C. D.)

Well, this is the place all right. No. 99 Spring, between Summer and Winter. I was an actor and a manager once, but ever since my play has failed I'm at liberty, or as they say in slang I'm dead broke, and when an actor or a manager is broke he'll do almost anything to make an honest dollar. A friend of mine told me there was a sick horse in this house; I know what I'll do, I'll just make him believe I'm a horse doctor, get some mizouma and Richard will be himself once again.

(*Enter SOUBRETTE from door R.*)

SOUBRETTE: Ah, stranger!

COMEDIAN: I beg your pardon.

SOUBRETTE: Well, sir, what do you want here?

COMEDIAN: I'm here on business. Even if I am poor.

SOUBRETTE: Did you say poor?

COMEDIAN: Yes, poor! P-u-r-e! Pure, poor, pure!

SOUBRETTE: (*Aside.*) That's him, Lord How Poor!

I beg your pardon, I knew you were coming, but I did not expect you.

COMEDIAN: Well, if you didn't expect me then I'm not here.

SOUBRETTE: I mean we did not expect you so soon.

(*Aside.*) Now to get rid of him.

But you are just as welcome as if you were in your own home.

COMEDIAN: (*Burlesquing her actions.*)

SOUBRETTE: Now if you'll excuse me, I'll go in the parlor and feed the cat.

COMEDIAN: Don't you keep the cat in the cellar?

SOUBRETTE: Of course not.

COMEDIAN: Why not?

SOUBRETTE: He's afraid of rats.

(*Exits with laughter; center door.*)

COMEDIAN: (*Pulls card out of his pocket.*) Well, this is the place all right. 99 Spring, between Summer and [W]inter. But it seems to me this girl has eagles in her skylight.

(*Enter SOUBRETTE C. D.*)

SOUBRETTE: Are you here yet?

COMEDIAN: Yes, I'm the same here yet.

SOUBRETTE: Now what do you want?

COMEDIAN: I want a glass of beer. No, no, no, I—I—want to go to work.

SOUBRETTE: Did you say work?

COMEDIAN: Yes, work.

SOUBRETTE: Hah, you ought to live in Cuba, over there everybody works. Everybody, everybody, everybody. (*Shakes her head in* COMEDIAN's *face.*)

COMEDIAN: (*Imitating her.*) Well, I'm from so so (*Local*) [w]here nobody works, nobody, nobody, nobody.

SOUBRETTE: Enough of this, Lord. I knew you the minute I saw you.

COMEDIAN: (*Surprised.*) Lord, I'm not a Lord.

SOUBRETTE: (*Jumping up and down.*) Oh, yes you are, yes you are, yes you are.

COMEDIAN: (*Imitating her jump.*) Oh, no I ain't, no I ain't, no I ain't. (*Bus. ad lib, etc.*)

SOUBRETTE: (*Puts her arms around* COMEDIAN's *neck.*) Now aren't you the Lord?

COMEDIAN: (*Half dazed.*) Yes, I'm the Lord. And the Lord knows who I am. And if I stay here much longer I'll be a lobster.

SOUBRETTE: Lord, I suppose when you left home, thousands of people saw you off.

COMEDIAN: Oh, yes, yes.

(*Aside.*) About fourteen sheriffs.

SOUBRETTE: And they all hopes you would soon return.

COMEDIAN: Oh, yes, yes.

(*Aside.*) If I'd ever come back they'd hang me.

SOUBRETTE: Oh, how forgetful I am. Will you have a little wine?

COMEDIAN: A little? Why, plenty.

SOUBRETTE: All you want. A hoop-la-la. (*Exits C. D.*)

COMEDIAN: (*Pulls card out of his pocket again.*) This is the place all right. 99 Spring between Summer and Winter. A little wine, will I have a little wine? Oh, say, I struck a cinch.

(*Enter* SOUBRETTE—*Tray in hand marching all around stage;* COMEDIAN *follows her, places tray and wine on small table; bus. explained.* COMEDIAN *grabs bottle.*)

SOUBRETTE: Allow me to help you. (*Pours wine into glass.* COMEDIAN *takes bottle by the neck and drinks from bottle.*) Lord, you are not afraid of spirits, are you?

COMEDIAN: Not while I've got 'em by the neck.

SOUBRETTE: (*Aside.*) Isn't the Duke lovely. What's the matter with me marrying him myself. I kind a like him. Lord, Lord, have you ever had an affair of the heart?

COMEDIAN: No, but I had malaria once.

SOUBRETTE: (*Acting rather shy.*) Have you never thought—of getting—getting—

COMEDIAN: Come on, come on, say something.

SOUBRETTE: Getting—married?

COMEDIAN: No, little one, I could never find anyone who would commit such a terrible crime. (*Lady acting very bashful and shy.*) Well, I beg your pardon, Miss, are you single or double?

SOUBRETTE: Why single, of course.

COMEDIAN: Single? Single, did you say? How dare you be single? When there are so many men in this town out of work?

SOUBRETTE: (*Lays her head on* COMEDIAN's *shoulder.*) Oh, this is so sudden.

COMEDIAN: There goes that old chestnut again. Now will you promise to support me?

SOUBRETTE: Sir?

COMEDIAN: I—I—mean, marry me?

SOUBRETTE: I will, but you'll have to give me time.

COMEDIAN: O, I'll give you time, I'll give you six months. And if you break your word I'll sue you for breech of breaches.

SOUBRETTE: Sir!

COMEDIAN: I mean breach of promise. But before we go any further, I want you to understand right now I'm not a Lord or a Duke. I'm a doctor.

SOUBRETTE: (*Surprised.*) The doctor? Oh, you wretch. I would not marry you in a thousand years.

COMEDIAN: Of course not. We'll both be dead by that time. But business before pleasure. So let's get to business.

(SOUBRETTE *sits on chair left;* COMEDIAN *chair to right; little book and pencil in COMEDIAN's hand.*)

COMEDIAN: Now where is the patient?

SOUBRETTE: (*Points to room L.*) In there.

COMEDIAN: (*To the audience.*) He must be an expensive horse. She keeps him in the parlor bedroom. (*To the* SOUBRETTE.) Now you must think a great deal of him.

SOUBRETTE: Yes, the family could not get along without him. He supplies all our wants.

COMEDIAN: (*Aside.*) He must be a race horse.

(*Aloud.*) Is he fast?

SOUBRETTE: (*Angry.*) Sir? He's not fast.

COMEDIAN: (*Ad lib.*) (*Bus. etc.*) Of course not, of course not. He must be one of those muts, that I went broke on more than once. (*To* SOUBRETTE.) Would you give me a few pointers?

SOUBRETTE: Why certainly.

COMEDIAN: How is his appetite?

SOUBRETTE: Very poor, doctor, very poor. All he ate this morning was two scrambled eggs and a cup of tea.

COMEDIAN: (*Falls off chair.*) (*Ad lib. Bus., etc.*) (*To himself.*) A cup of tea and two scrambled eggs for a horse. Now I wish I was a horse.

(*Aloud to her.*) But this will never do, Miss, you must give him some chopped hay mixed with oats.

SOUBRETTE: (*To the audience.*) Why this man is crazy.

(*Aloud.*) He could never chew that kind of food.

COMEDIAN: Well that will be all right. I'll file his teeth.

SOUBRETTE: (*Ad lib, bus., etc.*)

COMEDIAN: Has he ever had the heaves?

SOUBRETTE: (*Very angry.*) Certainly not.

COMEDIAN: That's good, that's good. Does he sleep well?

SOUBRETTE: No doctor, he kicks and tosses all night.

COMEDIAN: Oh, that's natural; he feels the oats.

SOUBRETTE: Yes, but it keeps us all awake nights.

COMEDIAN: Does anyone sleep with him?

SOUBRETTE: Why certainly.

COMEDIAN: Who?

SOUBRETTE: Why his wife[!]

COMEDIAN: (*Jumps up from the chair with a yell.*) His wife? (*Walks up and down stage.*) (*All excited, bus., ad lib, etc.*) This girl is daffy all right. Is he nervous?

SOUBRETTE: Yes, doctor, ever since he has been elected to Congress he sleeps very little.

COMEDIAN: (*Astonished.*) Well, I have heard of jackasses being elected to Congress, but this is the first time I have heard of a horse filling that position. Now tell me, Miss, what makes him so nervous?

SOUBRETTE: He worries about his children.

COMEDIAN: (*Up in the air again, all excited.*) Children, children?

(*To the audience.*) Oh, she means the colt.

Has he been harnessed lately?

SOUBRETTE: I don't understand you.

COMEDIAN: Is he well knuckled?

SOUBRETTE: (*Laughing.*) Oh, yes, yes, he does sometimes.

COMEDIAN: (*Business.*) He does sometimes. He does what sometimes?

SOUBRETTE: Why he plays pinochle.

COMEDIAN: (*Bus., pulling his hair, excited.*) Oh, he plays pinochle. Well he must be a game horse all right. Now tell me, what have you been doing for his nervousness?

SOUBRETTE: (*Aside.*) I'll make him believe Mr. Knight is my father.

(Aloud.) Why mother sings to him.

COMEDIAN: Mother sings to him? Mother sings to him? Oho, mama sings to a horse. And what does mother sing? Way Down on the Farm, or Mid the Green Fields of Virginia?

(*Rises from chair, makes a bluff to go to the room.*) Now could I see him?

SOUBRETTE: (*Stops him.*) Oh, no, no, no, doctor, he's fast asleep, and you might wake him up. Don't you think you had better wait?

COMEDIAN: Very well. What's his name?

SOUBRETTE: Summer's [Somers] Night [Knight], but they call him Sum for short.

COMEDIAN: (*Opens the little grip, takes out a large china egg.*) Well, Miss, I've another call to make, but before I go I wish you would give him this pill. (*Hands lady egg.*)

SOUBRETTE: (*Surprised.*) Why, what will this do?

COMEDIAN: Why this will help Sum.

SOUBRETTE: Why he could never swallow that.

COMEDIAN: Why of course not. You dissolve it, in a barrel of water. And give him a bucket full every hour.

SOUBRETTE: Why, I never heard of such a thing.

COMEDIAN: Well, you hear it now. And in the morning, have his shoes taken off, turn him out in the pasture, turn the hose on him and let him eat all the grass he wants.

SOUBRETTE: (*Frightened to death.*) Why this man is a lunatic. I mustn't oppose him. He might get violent. All right, doctor. All right, doctor.

(*Keeps on repeating all right, doctor, until off stage with pill in her hand looking at the doctor very much scared, exits to room L.*)

COMEDIAN: (*Looking after her, imitating her, all right, doctor, all right, doctor, etc.*) That girl is daffy all right. I think I better go in and have a look at him. (*Opens the door half way.*) Why there isn't a horse in there. Only an old man, asleep in bed. I knew that girl was kidding me all the time. Why, the idea of a horse in the parlor bedroom. Well, that's a horse on me all right. He must be out in the barn. Of course he's out in the barn. I better go out there and examine him. (*Picks up grip and all and exits C. D.*) (*Enter* SOUBRETTE *from room L. looks in ver[y] scared.*)

SOUBRETTE: Doctor, Oh, doctor, he's gone. Thank goodness. I wish some of the family would return. If that crazy doctor comes back here again I will die of heart disease.

(*She looks in room L.*) Oh, I'm so glad Mr. Knight is asleep. I'm sure the rest will do him good. Now I'll go in the garden and pick some of his favorite flowers for his room. (*Exits*) (*R.* first entrance)

(*Bus. of crash on the outside, pistol shots, etc., etc.*)

(COMEDIAN *tumbles in on his head, hair mussed up, no collar on, black eye, etc., etc.) (Ad lib, bus.*)

Now I've done it. I went out in the barn and blew a pound of arsenic down that old plag's throat and he dropped dead. The best thing I can do now to get a piece of money is to bury him.

(SOUBRETTE *enters quickly from L.*)

SOUBRETTE: Oh, Doctor, have you seen him?

COMEDIAN: (*All excited.*) Oh, yes, I've seen him! I don't think he'll need any more medicine.

SOUBRETTE: Oh, I'm so glad he's out of pain.

COMEDIAN: Yes, he's dead.

SOUBRETTE: Dead? Dead, did you say? Oh, you murderer! (*Bus., crying, etc.*)

COMEDIAN: Now look here, Miss, don't you call me a murderer. But if that is the way you feel about him, I'll pay for him.

SOUBRETTE: (*Very angry.*) Pay for him? Pay for him? Oh, you wretch! Why all the money in the world couldn't pay for him, and replace him.

COMEDIAN: Oh, quit your kidding. Why, he was nothing but a bundle of skin and bones.

SOUBRETTE: He was not. He weighted one hundred and ninety pounds.

COMEDIAN: Well, it's a cinch he didn't weigh any more. The best thing you can do if you are so stuck on him is to have him skinned[,] and then have him stuffed and when you get tired of him you can kick th[e] stuffing out of him.

SOUBRETTE: Have him skinned? (*Aside.*) He wants to have poor Mr. Knight skinned. Oh you rascal, what do you mean?

COMEDIAN: Why, he's better off dead, poor beast.

SOUBRETTE: (*Screams at top of voice.*) Beast, beast[!] Oh, you wretch.

COMEDIAN: You ought to thank me for putting him out of his misery. (*Bus of taking off his coat and going to C. door*) I better skin him myself and then sell his carcass for soap grease.

(SOUBRETTE *stops him.*)

SOUBRETTE: You shall not skin the poor man.

COMEDIAN: (*Surprised*) Man? What man?

SOUBRETTE: Why, the man you killed in the other room. (*Points to room L*)

COMEDIAN: (*Laughing, bus, etc*)

SOUBRETTE: Laugh, you cold-blooded assassin.

COMEDIAN: Now this is a mistake, Miss. I haven't killed any man. I'm talking about a bum horse in the barn. He's dead.

SOUBRETTE: Then you have not killed Mr. Knight?

COMEDIAN: Not tonight, goodnight.

SOUBRETTE: Saved, saved! Doctor, catch me quick, I'm going to flop! (*Falls in a faint in doctor's arms*)

COMEDIAN: (*Bus., ad lib, etc.*) Now I'm in a nice fix. She has fainted and I haven't

the faintest idea what to do. Oh, come on, come on, wake up. Why I must call for help. Assistance, assistance! This is getting serious—help, help!

(*Enter* PROPERTY MAN *C door*) Are you the help?

PROPERTY MAN: Yes.

COMEDIAN: Take a chair. (PROPS *takes chair and exits C Door*) Well, what to do now. I've got it. Rats.

(SOUBRETTE *comes to; jumps on chair, table, etc, bus explained*)

SOUBRETTE: Where are the rats? Where are the rats?

COMEDIAN: Why in the cellar.

SOUBRETTE: Oh, you rascal. You apology for a man. (*Chases* COMEDIAN *all over the stage*) How dare you scare a poor innocent little girl like me? (*Crying*)

COMEDIAN: Now see here—

SOUBRETTE: (*Still crying louder*) Don't you dare to talk to me, don't you dare touch me.

COMEDIAN: That's a nice way to treat your future husband.

SOUBRETTE: Husband, husband? I wouldn't marry an old bum horse doctor.

COMEDIAN: I am not a horse doctor.

SOUBRETTE: You are not a horse doctor? You are not the family physician, you're not a Duke, you are not a Lord—then what are you?

COMEDIAN: I'm an actor and manager.

SOUBRETTE: Why, a real live actor? Oh, I'd love to go on the stage.

COMEDIAN: Well, what can you do?

SOUBRETTE: I can do (*so and so whatever specialty may be*)

COMEDIAN: Well, I'm from Missouri and you have to show me.

SOUBRETTE: Will you wait here till I come back? I'll show you.

COMEDIAN: I certainly will.

(SOUBRETTE *exit[s] R* first entrance) (COMEDIAN *introduces his specialty*, SOUBRETTE *introduces her specialty, and both finish up th[ei]r act with double specialty in one*.)

Harry Newton was a prolific author of short sketches for performers, professional and amateur, and specialized in dialect speeches, minstrel and ethnic. Perhaps Newton's version of a miserable Jewish husband was inspired by Julian Rose's renowned "Levinsky at the Wedding," as well as by the well-worn theme of hen-pecked husbands.

"Abie Cohen's Wedding Day," in Harry L. Newton, *Some Vaudeville Monologues* (Minneapolis: T. S. Denison, 1917), 41–46.

Character: Abie Cohen is a ready conversationalist, when his hands are free.

Abie, seriously advises:

Take it away from me, I vouldn't tell you no lie, but double marriage is vorser than single cussedness.

Every time I think back ahead and think how happy I vas when I was it a single man, I get a headache in de head.

First, I asked de father from de girl dot I married, if I got married his daughter, vould I be happy.

He said it, ''My boy, you vill never know true happiness until you are married.''

Vell, by de time I found it out he was right, it was too late.

De girl I married said it she was a duchess in her own right. I found out she had a good vallop in her left, too.

I shall never forget it my vedding day.

De ceremony was called for five o'clock in the afternoon.

You see, nobody wanted to have it their whole day spoiled.

But I, like a chump, vas afraid I vould be late. So I hired a taxis cab. If I should know it then what I know now, I vould have valked.

De taxis cab went so fast we got a pinch from a cop policemans officer.

It made de taxis cab driver so mad he valloped the cop policemans officer in de jaw. Then two more cops came up and they brought us before de judge.

De judge looked at me and said, ''Say, didn't I tell you de last time I never vanted to see you here again?''

I says, ''Sure you did, judge. That's what I told de cops policemans officers, but they wouldn't believe me.''

Then de judge said, ''Can't this affair be settled out of court?''

De taxis cab driver said, ''Your honor, that's what we was trying to do when them two cops butted in.''

De judge says, ''Vell, you are charged with breaking up de speed limits. Where was you going in such a hurry?''

I told de judge I vas on my vay to get married.

Then de judge says to de cop policemans officer:

''What do you mean bringing this man to me to be punished? If he was on his way to get married, ain't that enough punishment? Let him go and get it.''

Vell, I had four hundred dollars saved up, and I put it in de bank. De next veek I drew it out again. Every time I vent in de bank de cashier had his hat on. He always looked like he was going avay out of town.

Vell, anyhow, when I go to de house de bride was vaiting for me. She vas afraid she would lose me otherwise.

All our friends and neighbors and a couple hundred members from de lodge was waiting, too.

But they was waiting to get a crack at de supper.

I'll bet them loafers had been saving up their appetites for a week.

Them members from de lodge go to a vedding on average once a day. On that account it don't cost them nothing to eat. They should vorry about de high cost of living. All they got to do is congratulate somebody. Somebody should congratulate them for not costing them any money to eat.

Everybody at de vedding congratulated me except de father from de bride. He was de only one who knew what I was getting.

One fellow said, ''I think I shall congratulate you. You are going to be very happy.'' Oh, but he made a bum think.

Oi, I should be happy when I had to pay out my good money to feed all them loafers.

De father from de bride had de ring all ready, and de bride weighed in at de ringside at exactly 310 pounds.

Veepin' Rachel, she was a fat bride. She was so fat that when she went out at night she hung a red lantern on her to show that de street was blocked. But I thought a lot of her—310 pounds worth.

I think her age was somewhere between twenty-eight and her low-neck gown.

Nobody kissed de bride. They all wanted to hang on to their appetites.

One old lady looked at de bride de once-over and de up and down, and then she did de same to me and said: ''I think he should be happy.''

And a fellow said, ''Vell, he's got a fat chance.''

But I am gratified for one thing. I didn't pay de minister. De father from de bride paid him. I wouldn't pay no man for doing me a mean trick like he did. I don't know what de father from de bride paid de minister, but it should have been life.

When we left de house everybody threw old shoes at us.

Dot was all right except one fellow who forgot to take his foot out of his shoe.

When I think of it all, I could lie on de bed and blow out de gas. But de bill would be so big I couldn't afford it.

De bride and me vent to live in a six-room compartment.

Five rooms for her and de other one for me.

I think de landlord said it there was a bath room, with hot and cold running water. He was mistaken. De water was in no hurry—it didn't even walk.

De dining room is large. It would seat forty people—but I hope not.

De cost of living is so high that when we have steak all de neighbors come in and stand around and look at it.

De flats in de building are so close together that I can reach from our kitchen right into de next door neighbor's pantry. Take it away from me, that's a big saving.

De landlord wanted from me fifty dollars month rent. He said he thought he had that much coming to him. He has yet. I never paid him. De building was built in a hurry. After de first month it began to settle. De building settled, but I didn't.

After de first month de building had settled so much that de people on de third floor was living in de basement. Nothing stayed up but de rents.

De first Saturday I came home and from my six dollars wages I gave it my wife five dollars and kept one dollar for myself. De next Saturday I kept five dollars and give it to my wife one dollar. She hollered. She said, ''Say, how do you expect me to make out on a dollar?'' I says, ''Vell, it is a tough job. I had a rotten time myself last veek.''

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General

There are many excellent introductions to nineteenth-century popular entertainment. The most wide-ranging are Robert C. Toll, *On with the Show: The First Century of Show Business in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (1993; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); and *American Popular Entertainment: Papers and Proceedings of the Conference on the History of American Popular Entertainment*, ed. Myron Matlaw (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979). Very useful for their excellent illustrations are Richard W. Flint, *Step Right Up! Amusement for All: Show Business at the Turn of the Century* (Rochester, N.Y.: Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, 1977); and Donna R. Braden, *Leisure and Entertainment in America* (Dearborn, Mich.: Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, 1988). The outstanding local studies are Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), on Worcester, Massachusetts; and Gregory A. Waller, *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896–1930* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), on Lexington, Kentucky.

Too often, discussion of the stage is divorced from that of the street. One exception is Peter G. Buckley, "Paratheatricals and Popular Stage Entertainment," in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to 1870*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 424–81. Brooks McNamara has a similarly broad-ranging discussion in many essays, notably, "The Scenography of Popular Entertainment," *Drama Review* 18 (March 1974): 16–24; "Popular Entertainments," in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*. vol. 2, *1870–1945*, ed. Wilmeth and Bigsby (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 378–410; and "Defining Popular Culture," *Theatre History Studies* 18 (1998): 3–12. Outstanding books on entertainment and broader cultural change are Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), Michael G. Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century* (New York: Knopf, 1999); and Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Similarly

wide-ranging studies of Europe are Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Spectacle of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (London: Verso, 1991); Charles Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque: Entertainment and Festivity in Turn-of-the-Century France* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985); and Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage, 1800–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

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Dime Museum

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and Giroux, 1998); and Joanne Martell, *Millie-Christine: Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair, 2000).

All scholars acknowledge P. T. Barnum's genius for publicity and the time, money and effort he spent in making his exhibits celebrities. His hoaxes were more transparent and more daring than the frauds of his peers and predecessors. He succeeded in molding his image as that of an amusing rogue rather than a scandalous charlatan, and his humorous approach to "humbug," as shown in his best-selling autobiography—*The Life of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself* (1855; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000)—caught the mood of the nation. David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), explains the significance of comic irreverence in the late 1840s and 1850s. There are excellent studies: Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum* (Boston: Little Brown, 1973); A. H. Saxon, *P. T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Bluford Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U.S. Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); and Benjamin Reiss, "P. T. Barnum, Joice Heth, and Antebellum Spectacles of Race," *American Quarterly* 51 (March 1999): 78–107, expanded in his *Showman and the Slave: Race, Death, and Memory in Barnum's America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). Philip B. Kunhardt Jr., Philip B. Kunhardt III, Peter W. Kunhardt, *P. T. Barnum: America's Greatest Showman* (New York: Knopf, 1995), is sumptuously illustrated and carefully researched, and the video *P .T. Barnum: America's Greatest Showman* (Discovery Channel, 1996) elaborates on themes in the Kunhardts' book. The video *P. T. Barnum: American Dreamer* (A & E, 1994) also has some excellent commentary. The American History Project has begun a virtual map of the second floor of Barnum's Museum (see web.gsuc.cuny.edu/ashp/LITBar), with an extensive file of contemporary documents.

Minstrelsy

Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy, ed. Anne-Marie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1996) reprints outstanding essays and brief primary sources and adds some new essays. Much of the early scholarship was descriptive: the best are Carl Wittke, *Tambo and Bones: A History of the American Minstrel Stage* (1930; Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1968); and Daily Paskman and Sigmund Spaeth, *"Gentlemen, Be Seated!": A Parade of the Old-Time Minstrels* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1928). Constance Rourke's elegant essay, "That Long-Tail'd Blue," part of her larger study, *American Humor: A Study of the National Character* (1931; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1953), 70–90, noted the influence of southwestern folklore on slave songs reinterpreted by the two outstanding entrepreneurs, "Jim Crow" Rice and Dan Emmett.

Robert C. Toll was the leading scholar of the 1970s. His *Blacking Up: The*

Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) remains the most detailed general account. Slavery and segregation created blackface, but minstrelsy was more than the simple expression of racial prejudice. The grinning black mask concealed whites' psychological needs: celebration of plantation anarchy obscured the reality of sectional strife and industrial urbanism, and images of ludicrous blacks reassured those troubled by the lack of freedom allowed to the largest minority. Sam Dennison, *Scandalize My Name: Black Imagery in American Popular Music* (New York: Garland, 1982), gives abundant details of prejudice, but little explanation. J. Stanley Lemons, "Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880–1920," *American Quarterly* 29 (spring 1977): 102–16, traces minstrel images in ephemera and material culture. Joseph Boskin, *Sambo: The Rise and Fall of an American Jester* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), chaps. 3 and 4, sketches the lasting influence of the black fool.

Musicologists explored whether minstrelsy had genuine African American roots. *The Early Minstrel Show* (New World Records compact disk) provides performances of typical songs. Hans Nathan, *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), traces the connections between the Virginia Minstrels and the songs of the slaves. Others see the music as largely white invention. Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (New York: Norton, 1979), chaps. 6 and 10, shows that traditional Irish tunes were given new words. Robert B. Winans, "Early Minstrel Show Music, 1843–1852," in *Musical Theatre in America: Papers and Proceedings of the Conference on the Musical Theatre in America*, ed. Glenn B. Loney (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984), 71–98, also sees little evidence of slave authorship and argues that a creeping sentimentalism brought blackface music closer to the mainstream. Dale Cockrell, "Nineteenth-Century Popular Music," in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 158–85, surveys minstrelsy in context.

There were always critical voices arguing that Toll's liberal, civil-rights interpretation was incomplete. William F. Stowe and David Grimsted, "White-Black Humor," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 3 (1975): 78–96, saw enjoyment in wit and genuine affection as well as derogatory comment. For Nathan Huggins, *The Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), chap. 7, the blackface mask was liberating and allowed whites the freedom to express longings repressed by Victorianism. In "Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology," *American Quarterly* 27 (March 1975): 3–28, modified in his *Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1990), 165–82, Alexander Saxton saw early minstrel songs as largely supporting the Democratic party and its alliance of New York's Tammany Hall and the proslavery South. For David Roediger in *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991), chap. 6, blackface was a convenient unifying symbol for the poor to transcend ethnicity and forge a class alliance against privilege.

Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*

(New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), is the most nuanced and sophisticated interpretation, blending cultural-studies theory with close attention to literary expression and social background. Representations, he argues, were ambiguous and ambivalent, revealing disgust and desire, jealousy and contempt. Although it has relatively little specifically on minstrelsy, Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), traces white fascination with the black body. Two recent studies, based on the most extensive original research, explore the social context most thoroughly. W. J. Lhamon Jr., *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), and Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), examine minstrelsy origins in New York City. William J. Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), is an extraordinarily wide-ranging study of its burlesque elements as portrayed in words and music. Philip F. Gura, "America's Minstrel Daze," *New England Quarterly* 72 (December 1999): 602–16, is a perceptive review of this new research.

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The Circus

Of all the fields of popular entertainment, circus history is the least analytical. The best general studies are Helen Stoddart, *Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), and the forthcoming studies of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries by Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), and of Britain, by Brenda Assael, *The Circus and Victorian Society* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia). Richard W. Flint has three excellent essays: "The Evolution of the Circus in Nineteenth-Century America," in *American Popular Entertainment: Papers and Proceedings of the Conference on the History of American Popular Entertainment,* ed. Myron Matlaw (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), 187–95; "The Circus in America: The World's Largest, Grandest, Best Amusement Institution," *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress* 40 (summer 1983): 202–33; and "Entrepreneurial and Cultural Aspects of the Early-Nineteenth-

Century Circus and Menagerie Business," in *Itineracy in New England and New York*, Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings 1984, ed. Peter Benes (Boston: Boston University Press, 1986), 132–49.

Stuart Thayer's very detailed investigations of local newspapers have made older descriptive accounts obsolete: *Traveling Showmen: The American Circus before the Civil War* (Detroit: Astley and Ricketts, 1997); *Annals of the American Circus, 1793–1860* (Seattle: Duven and Thayer, 2000); and, with William L. Stout, *Grand Entrée: The Birth of the Greatest Show on Earth, 1870–1875* (San Bernardino, Calif.: Borgo Press, 1998). David Carlyon, *Dan Rice: The Most Famous Man You've Never Heard Of!* (New York: Public Affairs Press, 2002), is a modern biography of the most renowned performer. Although P. T. Barnum entered the circus business seriously only in the 1870s and 1880s and left day-to-day administration to others, his career has generated some of the most perceptive discussions of the circus and society: Harris, *Humbug*, chap. 9; Saxon, *P. T. Barnum*, chaps. 11–14; and Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum*, chap. 4.

Melodrama

The standard general reference to the drama is *Cambridge Guide to American Theatre*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Tice Miller (New York: Cambridge University Press, rev. ed., 1996). The most useful introductions to major themes and genres are the essays in *The Cambridge History of the American Theatre*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to 1870*; vol. 2, *1870–1945*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 1999). Surveys of major dramatists and plays include Gary A. Richardson, *American Drama from the Colonial Period through World War I: A Critical History* (New York: Twayne, 1993); and two by Walter J. Meserve: *An Emerging Entertainment: The Drama of the American People to 1828* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); and *Heralds of Promise: The Drama of the American People in the Age of Jackson, 1828–1849* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

Since the American theater imitated the style and content of foreign plays, the European context is especially relevant. The analytical studies of Michael Booth are outstanding, notably, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965), and *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Martha Vicinus's brief and incisive essay, "'Helpless and Unfriended': Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama," *New Literary History* 13 (autumn 1981): 127–43, is reprinted in *When They Weren't Doing Shakespeare: Essays in Nineteenth-Century British and American Theatre*, ed. Judith Fisher and Stephen Watt (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 174–86. Frank Rahill, *The World of Melodrama* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967); Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976); *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, ed. Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1994); and *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*, ed.

Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), discuss modern critical perspectives.

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There is a large literature on the broader social context. Bruce A. McConachie, "Pacifying American Theatrical Audiences, 1820–1900," in *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*, ed. Richard Butsch (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 47–70; and Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), explore the changing composition of "popular" audiences. Harlowe R. Hoyt, *Town Hall Tonight* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1955), is a good local study of theater in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. Also useful for understanding the appeal of melodrama are Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790–1920* (New York: Norton, 1992); and Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (1987; London: Verso, 1998), on popular novels with an urban theme. Francis Hodge, *Yankee Theatre: The Image of America on the Stage, 1825–1850* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), discusses early national character.

There are good social-history studies of the theater. Rosemarie K. Bank, *Theatre Culture in America, 1825–1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), examines the fit between dramatic representations and social reality. On the acting profession, see Benjamin McArthur, *Actors and American Culture, 1880–1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); and Claudia D. Johnson, *American Ac-*

tress: Perspective on the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1984). Faye E. Dudden, *Women in the American Theatre: Actresses and Audiences, 1790–1870* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), is wide-ranging and incisive.

Weldon B. Durham's edited *American Theatre Companies, 1749–1887* and *1888–1930* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986, 1987) are essential references. George C. D. Odell's fifteen-volume *Annals of the New York Stage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927–49) is exceptionally thorough. The most wide-ranging collection of theatrical texts is *Dramas from the American Theatre, 1762–1909*, ed. Richard Moody (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1966). Among the more recent anthologies are *Early American Drama*, ed. Jeffrey Richards (New York: Penguin, 1997), and *Staging the Nation: Plays from the American Theatre, 1787–1909*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth (New York: Bedford, 1998). Readex Corporation's microfiche *Nineteenth-Century English and American Plays* is the only comprehensive collection; Chadwyck-Healey's CD-ROM *American Drama* series is much more selective.

"Leg Show" Burlesque

Michael Booth explains the nature of the European *feérie* and extravaganza in his edited *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 5, *Pantomimes, Extravaganzas and Burlesques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). Claire McGlinchee, "The Marvellous in the Pantomimes: Spectacles and Extravaganzas in the 19C American Theatre," *Revue d'histoire du théatre* 15 (January–March 1963): 63–70, sketches its introduction to the northeastern United States. Cecil Smith and Glenn Litton, *Musical Comedy in America* (1950; New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1981), 2–87, is succinct and comprehensive, but Deane L. Root, *American Popular Stage Music, 1860–1880* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981), chap. 3, has the most detailed description of the spectacular stage shows. Laurence Senelick, *The Age and Stage of George L. Fox, 1825–1877* (1988; Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), is a pioneering study of midcentury pantomime.

The most detailed examination of "leg-show" burlesque in America is Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); its main shortcoming is its failure to explore traditions before 1866 in America and Europe. Faye E. Dudden, *Women in the American Theatre: Actresses and Audiences, 1790–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), chap. 7; and Peter G. Buckley, "The Culture of 'Leg Work': The Transformation of Burlesque after the Civil War," in *The Mythmaking Frame of Mind: Social Imagination and American Culture*, ed. James Gilbert et al. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1993), 113–34, are excellent supplements. Two fine studies of women's fashion and attitudes toward the female body in the 1860s are Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), chaps. 6 and 7, and William R. Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society* (New York: Basic, 1981), chap. 9. Kurt Gänzl, *Lydia Thompson: Queen of Burlesque* (New York: Routledge, 2002), is a detailed biography of the major British star. Donna

Carlton, *Looking for Little Egypt* (Bloomington, Ind.: IDD Books, 1994) is an original study of "Oriental" dancing at the turn of the century.

The Black Crook has received far more attention than other extravaganzas. Julian Mates, "The *Black Crook* Myth," *Theatre Survey* 7 (1966), 31–43, argued very effectively that its influence on the development of musical comedy was limited. Kristina Gintautiene, "*The Black Crook*: Ballet in the Gilded Age (1866–1876)" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1984), discusses aspects of dance fully. Laurilyn J. Harris, "Extravaganza at Niblo's Garden: *The Black Crook*," *Nineteenth Century Theatre Research* 13 (summer 1985): 1–15, and Leigh George Odom, "*The Black Crook* at Niblo's Garden," *Drama Review* 26 (spring 1982): 21–40, explore its reception in the New York press. John Russell David, "The Genesis of the Variety Theatre: The *Black Crook* Comes to St. Louis," *Missouri Historical Review* 64 (1970): 133–49, deals with the franchised production of April–July 1867 in the city. *The Black Crook* play text—probably only a guide for improvisations by the many different productions of the 1860s and 1870s—is most conveniently available in *The Black Crook and Other Nineteenth-Century American Plays*, ed. Myron Matlaw (New York: Dutton, 1966), 319–74; this differs in minor respects from the 1866 original printed in Chicago by Rounds and James. The novel, *The Black Crook, A Most Wonderful History. Now being performed with immense success in all the principal theatres throughout the United States* (Philadelphia: Barclay, 1866), has illustrations from the show, but in all other respects bears no resemblance whatsoever to the play.

The Wild West Show

The broadest coverage of live stage shows of frontier life, from George Catlin's exhibitions of Indians in the 1830s to the demise of the last rodeo-circuses a century later, is Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). One of the original features of the wild west shows was the demonstration of "cowboy fun" and skills associated with cattle-ranching. Lonn Taylor and Ingrid Maar, *The American Cowboy* (Washington, D.C.: American Folklife Center, 1983), and Don Russell, "The Cowboy from Black Hat to White," *Red River Historical Review* 2 (1975): 13–23, discuss the invention of the cowboy as a character in fiction and illustrated journalism in the 1870s and 1880s. Richard White surveys changing attitudes in the 1890s, and in particular, celebration of settlement of the land and conquest of the savages, in "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," in *The Frontier in American Culture: Essays by Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick*, ed. James R. Grossman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 6–65.

Don Russell offers the most complete survey of Buffalo Bill, his competitors, and successors in *The Wild West; or, A History of the Wild West Shows* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1970), a book with excellent photographs and illustrations of posters. Jack Rennert, *One Hundred Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (New York: Darien House, 1976), has significant information on the evolution of show images. The outstanding commentary on representation is Joy S. Kasson,

Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000). Kasson is acutely sensitive to the meaning of verbal and visual images, and to Cody's show as historical memory. She interprets the Wild West as highbrow/lowbrow, conveying both authenticity and nostalgia, with an emphasis on Indians, but has little on "cow-boy fun," manliness, and great-power posturing. *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West*, ed. David Katzive (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1981), is an excellent collection of essays, with appropriate illustrations, on the major elements of the show. The show, and particularly the guns and ephemera associated with the shooting exhibitions, is described and illustrated in detail in R. L. Wilson with Greg Martin, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: An American Legend* (New York: Random House, 1998). Richard Slotkin interprets the Wild West show in the context of America of the 1890s and the new ideology of expansion and rivalry with the major European powers; the staged reenactment of the conflict between white and red was the archetype for the struggle between the Anglo-Saxon "progressive" nations and the "primitive" races. Slotkin expounds this thesis in his essay in *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West* (1981), in "Buffalo Bill's'Wild West' and the Mythologization of the American Empire," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 164–68; and at length in his *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), chap. 2. Jonathan D. Martin, " 'The Grandest and Most Cosmopolitan Object Teacher' ": *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* and The Politics of American Identity, 1883–1899," *Radical History Review* 66 (1996): 96–122, has similar conclusions, but more emphasis on Darwinism as an ideological influence.

Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), is the most thorough study of Cody's career, its mythical aspects, and his symbolic status. *The Life of the Hon. William F. Cody, Known as Buffalo Bill, The Famous Hunter, Scout and Guide: An Autobiography* (1879; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978) is a reprint of the early "autobiography." Eric V. Sorg, *Buffalo Bill: Myth and Reality* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Ancient City Press, 1998), is a brief synthesis based on original archival research. The PBS video, *Buffalo Bill* (1992), dir. Donna Luistana, has interesting footage from the movie which Cody made in 1913 to re-create events a generation before. Roger A. Hall, *Performing The American Frontier, 1870–1906* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), sketches the melodramatic vision of male dominance and violent contest.

Two articles by William E. Deahl Jr. trace the beginnings of Buffalo Bill's Wild West: "Nebraska's Unique Contribution to the Entertainment World," *Nebraska History* 49 (autumn 1968): 283–97, and "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, 1885," *Annals of Wyoming* 47 (fall 1975): 139–51. William Brasmer, "The Wild West Exhibition and the Drama of Civilization," in *Western Popular Theatre*, ed. David Mayer and Kenneth Richards (London: Methuen, 1977), 133–56, examines the influence of theater director Steele MacKaye in restructuring the show's program in 1886. Sarah J. Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business: A History of Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), is largely descriptive. Black-

stone's *Business of Being Buffalo Bill: Selected Letters of William F. Cody, 1879–1917* (New York: Praeger, 1988) deals more with his failing speculative ventures and has relatively little on his entertainment strategy.

Much more has been written on the Indian exhibits than on the cowboy. Jeffrey Steele, "Reduced to Images: American Indians in Nineteenth-Century Advertising," in *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture*, ed. S. Elizabeth Bird (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), 45–64, is a careful study of popular depictions. In "The Indian Medicine Show," *Educational Theatre Journal* 23 (December 1971): 431–45, and more fully in *Step Right Up* (1976; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, rev. ed. 1995), chaps. 5–8, Brooks McNamara illuminates small-town attitudes to fakelore, and, by implication, how Cody's show was understood. L. G. Moses in *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883–1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), and "Wild West Shows, Reformers, and the Image of the American Indian, 1887–1914," *South Dakota Quarterly* 14 (fall 1984): 193–221, is authoritative and argues that Cody was generally held in high esteem by the Indians. Louis Pfaller, "'Enemies in '76, Friends in '85': Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill," *Prologue: Journal of the National Archives* 1 (fall 1969): 16–31, explores the uses made of the Sioux chief's brief appearance.

Gender studies has only recently made much impact. Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Race and Gender in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), has broad relevance. Glenda Riley, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), replaces all earlier biographies. Two essays by Tracy C. Davis—"Shotgun Wedlock: Annie Oakley's Power Politics in the Wild West," in *Gender in Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Hanover, N.H.: Tufts University/University Press of New Hampshire, 1992), 141–57, and "Annie Oakley and Her Ideal Husband of No Importance," in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 229–312—explore representations of the star second only to Cody.

Summer Amusement Parks

John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), is a highly original discussion of the class and culture clash exemplified by the genteel beach hotels and the mass commercial amusements on Surf Avenue and the Bowery. Kasson explores the tension between the showmen-entrepreneurs who devised the most effective ways of form and function to make their parks profitable and the Progressive reformers and most intellectuals who preferred directed, uplifting recreation. His incisive reading of contemporary journalism and photographs informs his interpretation of the meaning of the amusements as a "moral holiday," offering exhilarating reprise from convention. Jon R. Sterngass disagrees. In *First Resorts: Pursuing Pleasure at Saratoga Springs, Newport, and Coney Island* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), Sterngass argues

that the significant commercial development took place in the 1880s before the separate parks were created. The amusement attractions in the parks were neither original nor did they pose a serious challenge to polite decorum.

Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), chap. 5, qualifies Kasson's argument significantly by introducing a gendered perspective. Lower-class women, often those employed in retail sales or offices, used disposable income in excursions to suburban resorts. Heterosexual interaction added excitement, for at the amusement parks women were both liberated and assertive, and they were objects of visual spectacle. Peiss distinguishes between the simple carnivalesque pleasures of unpredictable thrills and unplanned encounters at Steeplechase and the technological novelties and surreal fantasies at Luna Park and Dreamland. In *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998), chap. 5, Lauren Rabinovitz explores the complexities of women as consumers and as commodity in movies depicting amusement-park encounters. There is little information on the perspectives of different ethnic groups, but Andrew R. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), sketches very briefly the responses of New York Jews.

Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas argues in *Delirious New York: A Retrospective Manifesto for Manhattan* (1978; New York: Monaceli Press, 1994), chap. 2, that Coney Island was an innovative "laboratory" for new building design and radical planning. Entrepreneurs exploited the "technology of the fantastic"—"fairy" towers and electric light—to create a futuristic city of illusion. Robert E. Snow and David Wright, "Coney Island: A Case Study in Popular Culture and Technical Change," *Journal of Popular Culture* 9 (spring 1976): 960–75, explore how enthusiastically the "parks" embraced mechanization. In "Disneyland and Coney Island: Reflections on the Evolution of the Modern Amusement Park," *Journal of Popular Culture* 26 (summer 1992): 131–64, Raymond M. Weinstein argues that Coney's success was a balance of shrewd and experienced showmanship and contrived visual spectacle. The most perceptive analysis of Frederic Thompson's aims is Woody Register, *The Kid of Coney Island: Fred Thompson and the Rise of American Amusements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), chap. 3.

Ellen M. Snyder-Grenier, *Brooklyn! An Illustrated Social History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), is an excellent summary. Most studies of Coney are richly descriptive: Oliver Pilot and Jo Ransom, *Sodom by the Sea: An Affectionate History of Coney Island* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1941); Edo McCullough, *Good Old Coney Island: A Sentimental Journey into the Past* (1957; New York: Fordham University Press, 2000); Lucy P. Gillman, "Coney Island," *New York History* 36 (July 1955): 255–90; and Richard Snow, *Coney Island: A Postcard Journey to the City of Fire* (New York: Brightwater Press, 1984); and Michael Immerso, *Coney Island: The People's Playground* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

Live shows of pageant scenes in exotic lands or reenactments of famous catastrophes and typical near-catastrophes were always popular within the parks and in specialized exhibition halls outside. Andrea Stulman Dennett and Nina Warnke, "Disaster Spectacles at the Turn of the Century," *Film History* 4 (1990): 101–11, explore the most renowned fire spectacles at Coney Island but ignore the re-creations of the Boer and the Spanish-American Wars; both live, staged action-melodramas and documentary-realistic battles at Coney Island influenced early movie-making. *Coney Island: A Documentary Film*, dir. Ric Burns (PBS, 1991, revised 2000), has excellent contemporary film of the beach and the parks at night.

On summer parks generally, the most wide-ranging analyses are Russel B. Nye, "Eight Ways of Looking at an Amusement Park," *Journal of Popular Culture* 15 (summer 1981): 63–75; Judith A. Adams, *The American Amusement Park Industry: A History of Technology and Thrills* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), chaps. 2 and 3; and David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (1993; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), chap. 7. Charles E. Funnell, *By the Beautiful Sea: The Life and High Times of that Beautiful Resort, Atlantic City* (New York: Knopf, 1975), explores the most popular neighboring resort.

Vaudeville

The major interpretative study is Robert W. Snyder, *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Other significant studies are Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times* (1940; New York: Dover, 1963), based on close observation of many of the stars; Albert F. McLean Jr., *American Vaudeville as Ritual* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965); and John DiMeglio, *Vaudeville U.S.A.* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, 1973). Useful brief analyses include Robert C. Toll, *On with the Show: The First Century of Show Business in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), chap. 6; Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), chap. 6; and David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (1993; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), chaps. 3 and 4.

Brooks McNamara, *The New York Concert Saloon: The Devil's Own Nights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), traces the origins of vaudeville in the 1860s and 1870s. There are fine studies of vaudeville managers: Robert C. Allen, "B. F. Keith and the Origins of American Vaudeville," *Theatre Survey* 21 (November 1980): 105–15; Parker Zellers, *Tony Pastor: Dean of the Vaudeville Stage* (Ypsilanti: Eastern Michigan University Press, 1971); Susan Kattwinkel, "Tony Pastor's Vaudeville: Serving the New York Community," *Library Chronicle of the University of Texas at Austin* 3 (1995), 50–75; and Kathryn J. Oberdeck, "Contested Cultures of American Refinement: Theatrical Manager Sylvester Poli, His Audiences, and the Vaudeville Industry, 1890–1920," *Radical History Review* 66 (1996): 40–91, expanded in her *Evangelist and the Impresario: Religion, Entertainment, and Cultural Politics in America*,

1884–1914 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). Anthony Slide, *Encyclopedia of Vaudeville* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), has good, brief biographical sketches.

As ethnic pluralism gave American cities a social mix very different from European, so ethnic caricature distinguished American vaudeville from European music-hall variety theater. The most perceptive general study is James H. Dormon, "American Popular Culture and the New Immigration Ethnics: The Vaudeville Stage and the Process of Ethnic Ascription," *Amerikastudien* 36 (1991): 179–93. Lawrence E. Mintz, "Humor and Ethnic Stereotypes in Vaudeville and Burlesque," *Melus* 21 (winter 1996): 19–28, summarizes major interpretations succinctly. Of the ethnic groups in vaudeville, the significant studies are of Jews, immigrant and native: Armond Fields and L. Marc Fields, *From the Bowery to Broadway: Lew Fields and the Roots of American Popular Theater* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Barbara W. Grossman, *Funny Girl: The Life and Times of Fanny Brice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Kenneth Silverman, *Houdini!!! The Career of Erich Weiss, America's Self-Liberator . . .* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996); and Harley Erdman, *Staging the Jew: The Performance of an American Ethnicity, 1860–1920* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

There are two outstanding studies of women in vaudeville: M. Alison Kibler, *Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in Vaudeville* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and Susan A. Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). Henry Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts? Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), chaps. 2 and 3, considers the "new humor" in which gags tended to be dissociated from narrative continuity and intellectual appreciation.

There is no better illustration of vaudeville style than the video of early performers in *Vaudeville: An American Masters Special* (PBS, 1997), produced by Greg Palmer. There are several fine compilations of primary sources—*American Vaudeville as Seen by Its Contemporaries*, ed. Charles W. Stein (New York: Knopf, 1984); and *Selected Vaudeville Criticism*, ed. Anthony Slide (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1988)—but the resources of the Library of Congress's *American Variety Stage: Vaudeville and Popular Entertainment, 1870–1920* at the American Memory web site (memory.loc.gov/ammem/vshtml/vshome.html) and the New York Public Library's Performing Arts in America, 1875–1923, website (dlc.nypl.org/lpa/nypl/about/about__index.html) are outstanding. Brooks McNamara, *American Popular Entertainments: Jokes, Monologues, Bits and Sketches* (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1983), has a representative selection of comedy from vaudeville, and he explains the context in "For Laughing Purposes Only: The Literature of American Popular Entertainment," in *The American Stage: Social and Economic Issues from the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Ron Engle and Tice L. Miller (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 141–58.

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